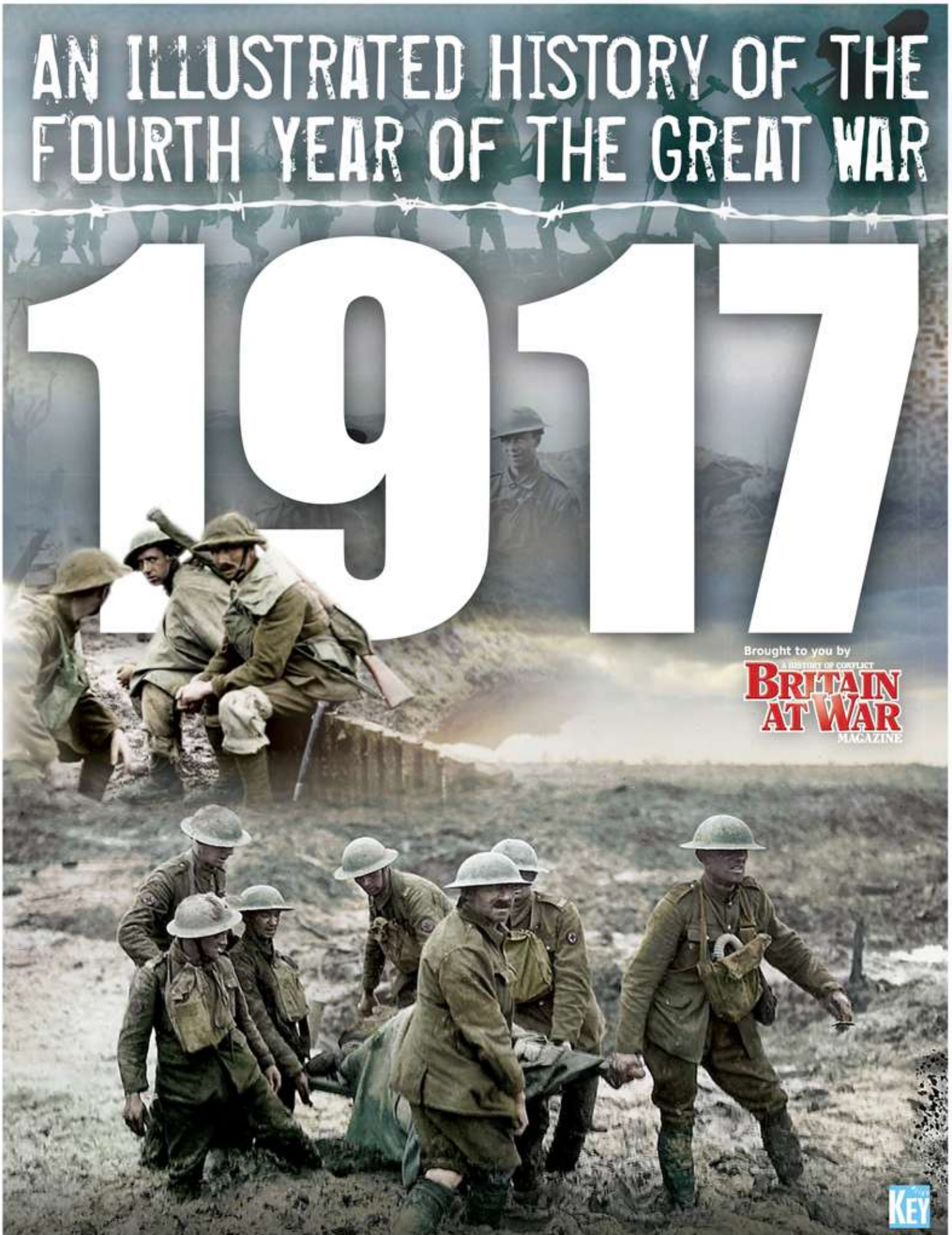
AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF THE FOURTH YEAR OF THE GREAT WAR

1917



Brought to you by

A HISTORY OF CONFLICT
BRITAIN AT WAR
MAGAZINE

KEY

Mud and Horror on the Western Front · The Battle of Passchendaele
Air Raids on London · Cambrai - First Large-Scale Use of Tanks
Jerusalem Captured · Zeppelin Shot Down · The Silvertown Explosion

£5.99

9 781910 415764 16

SCALE MODEL CONSTRUCTION KITS

World War I

Tanks of the Great War

A selection of model assembly kits by Takom, Tauro and Emhar.

TAKOM · TAURO MODEL LINE · EMHAR

WWI Heavy Battle Tank Mk IV Male
PKTAK02008

WWI British Mk I Male Tank
PKTAK02031

A7V German WWI Tank
PKTR101

Mk IV "Female" WWI Heavy Battle Tank
PKEM5002

Mk A "Whippet" WWI Medium Tank
PKEM5004

Mk IV "Tadpole" WWI Tank with Rear Mortar PKEM5005

Mk IV "Male" WWI Heavy Battle Tank PKEM4001

Mk V "Hermaphrodite" WWI Heavy Battle Tank PKEM4005

The Pocketbond 2016/17 144 page colour catalogue is packed with pictures of more than 2,500 plastic kits.
For your free copy send a £1.51 stamped addressed A4 envelope to the address below.

UK residents only. Allow 28 days for delivery.

BACHMANN EUROPE Plc
Model, Collect & Create

Bachmann Europe Plc, Dept 1917, Moat Way, Barwell, Leics, LE9 8EY. Trade enquiries only on tel 01455 841756, info@pocketbond.co.uk

www.pocketbond.co.uk

AVAILABLE IN ALL GOOD MODEL SHOPS

THE FOURTH YEAR OF THE GREAT WAR: 1917

The year of 1916 had been the bloodiest twelve months the Allies had so far experienced. British troops had marched to their deaths across No Man's Land on the Somme, and the French had been engulfed in unremitting slaughter at Verdun which lasted for almost ten months and saw casualty figures rise beyond half a million.

Yet both the battles of the Somme and Verdun were Allied successes. On both fronts the Germans had been beaten, losing at least as many men as their dogged enemies. That Germany was teetering on the brink of defeat was confirmed when the Kaiser indicated that he was willing to discuss peace terms in December – an offer that was rejected by the Allies who scented victory.

There could, therefore, be no relaxation of effort. The war of attrition that had seen the incremental weakening of the German Army, and the German nation, had to be maintained, even accelerated, throughout 1917. By the summer of that year, Field Marshal Haig's plans for a new offensive in Flanders were complete, with the initial attack being made against the German positions on Pilckem Ridge outside Ypres. It marked the start of the Third Battle of Ypres – better known as the Battle of Passchendaele.

The fourth year of the war also saw the reintroduction of unrestricted submarine warfare by the Germans, the Allied capture of Baghdad, the battles of Arras, Bullecourt and Messines, Canadian success at Vimy Ridge, the start of the Gotha bomber raids on London and the territory of German East Africa overrun.

Away from the battlefields, great events were to shape the future course of the war. Revolution in Russia ended its involvement in the fighting, but in to its place stepped the United States of America which was finally provoked into declaring war on Germany. These, and a catalogue of other events examined in the following pages, and which involved or had a direct impact upon the British and Commonwealth nations, tell the story of 1917.

John Grehan
Editor

Editor: John Grehan
Group Editor: Nigel Price
Assistant Editor: Martin Mace
Designer: Mike Carr

Executive Chairman: Richard Cox
Managing Director/Publisher: Adrian Cox
Commercial Director: Ann Saundry
Production Manager: Janet Watkins
Marketing Manager: Martin Steele

Contacts
Key Publishing Ltd
PO Box 100, Stamford, Lincolnshire, PE9 1XQ
E-mail: enquiries@keypublishing.com
www.keypublishing.com

Distribution: Seymour Distribution Ltd.
Telephone: +44 (0)20 7429 4000
Printed by Warners (Midlands) Plc, Bourne, Lincs.
The entire contents of this special edition is copyright © 2016. No part of it may be reproduced in any form or stored in any form of retrieval system without the prior permission of the publisher.

Published by Key Publishing Ltd
www.britain-at-war-magazine.com

MAIN IMAGE: A stranded British tank on the Passchendaele battlefield. (COURTESY OF PEN & SWORD BOOKS; WWW.PEN-AND-SWORD.CO.UK)

JANUARY
1 New Year's Honours **10**
7 Mottershead VC **11**
9 The Loss of HMS *Cornwallis* **12**
19 The Silvertown Disaster **13**
19 The Zimmermann Telegram **16**
25 The Loss of the SS *Laurentic* **18**

FEBRUARY
9 *Operation Alberich* **20**
19 Merchant Submarine Requisitioned **21**
21 The Mendi Disaster **23**
23 A State of the Nation Speech **24**
23 First Night Bomber Squadron Formed **26**
24 Kut El Amara Recaptured **27**

MARCH
6 Caring for the Wounded **28**
18 British Troops Enter Péronne **29**
20 Australia's Only WW1 Aerial VC **31**
21 First Imperial War Conference **32**
22 SMS *Möwe* Returns to Port **33**
25 Bapaume Booby Trap **34**
25 The First Battle of Gaza **36**

APRIL
6 The US Declares War **37**
9 The Battle of Arras **38**
9 The Battle at Vimy Ridge **40**
11 Offensive at Bullecourt **42**
20 Battle in the Channel **44**

MAY
4 US Destroyers Arrive **46**
18 Albert Ball Listed as Missing **47**
18 Trial Convoy Arrives **48**
21 The Formation of the Imperial War Graves Commission **49**
25 First Large-Scale Daylight Raid on Britain **51**

JUNE
2 Mass Investiture at Hyde Park **52**
4 OBE Established **54**
7 The Capture of Messines **55**
13 Worst Air Raid on London **57**
13 Ashton-under-Lyne Explosion **60**
17 Zeppelin *L.48* Shot Down **61**

THE EVENTS OF 1917
CONTENTS

JULY

3 Royal Visit to the Western Front **63**
9 The *Vanguard* Explosion **65**
17 Royal Name Change **66**
28 Tank Corps Formed **67**
31 The Third Battle of Ypres **68**

AUGUST

1 The Pope's Peace Note **70**
2 First Landing on a Moving Ship **71**
15 US Troops Parade in London **72**
16 The Fight for Langemarck **73**
17 The Smuts Report **74**
22 Last Daylight Raid **75**

SEPTEMBER

4 First Night Blitz on London **76**
20 The Battle of Menin Road **77**

OCTOBER

4 Broodseinde Ridge **78**
9 Battle of Poelcappelle **79**
11 No.41 Wing Formed **80**
19 The Silent Raid **81**
31 Beersheba Captured **82**

NOVEMBER

2 The Balfour Declaration **85**
9 The First Tank Bank **86**
10 Passchendaele Ends **88**
15 Statement in Parliament **89**
20 The Battle of Cambrai **90**

DECEMBER

1 Russia's Peace Plan **92**
6 Halifax Explosion **93**
9 The Fall of Jerusalem **94**
12 The 'Hero Land' Bazaar **96**
17 Rationing Begins **97**

The End of the Fourth Year of the Great War **98**

BELOW: A typical view of the Passchendaele battlefield during 1917. (COURTESY OF PEN & SWORD BOOKS; WWW.PEN-AND-SWORD.CO.UK)

THE FOURTH YEAR OF THE GREAT WAR: 1917

ABOVE: The man who ultimately directed much of the fighting that features in the following pages: Field Marshal Douglas Haig. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

The start of every new year brought with it hope but at the start of 1917 the only hope was that it would not be as terrible as the one that had preceded it. For 1916 had been the worse year so far in recorded human history. Nothing that had gone before, not even the Battle of the Marne in 1914 where half a million men had been killed or wounded, could remotely compare with the battles of the Somme and Verdun in which almost two million young soldiers had become casualties.

Towards the end of 1916 there had indeed been some hope that the Germans would surrender, with a tentative peace offer from Berlin, but with this offer came the threat that, should such approaches be rejected, the Germans would continue to resist indefinitely. Would the war go on until there was simply no-one left to fight?

It was the opinion of Field Marshal Haig that the Germans were on the verge of complete collapse and that the Allied forces should continue to attack the enemy until they finally succumbed, regardless of how many British and Commonwealth lives it cost. It was Haig's job to defeat the German Army, whatever it took. He could not concern himself unduly with casualties unless they affected his operational effectiveness.

The Great War, though, was a world war and whilst the main theatre was in western Europe, events elsewhere would have a profound effect upon the conflict. In Palestine, General Allenby's Egyptian Expeditionary Force defeated the German-backed Ottoman forces, taking first Baghdad, then Gaza and, eventually, the great prize of the Holy Land, Jerusalem.

In Russia, heavy defeats led to the Tsar stepping down from supreme command of the Army, which proved to be the first move towards his abdication (which eventually took place on 1 March 1917). The new Bolshevik government sought an end to the war, and agreed terms with Germany. On 15 December an armistice between the Russians and the Central Powers was signed and a halt called to the fighting. The Allies had lost a valuable member of the battle against the Germans,

ABOVE: A solitary soldier makes his way over the Passchendaele battlefield. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

ABOVE: Silhouetted against the sky, men of the 8th Battalion, East Yorkshire Regiment going up to the line near Frezenberg during the Battle of Broodseinde (also known as Broodseynde) on 5 October 1917. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

RIGHT: British troops laying a light railway line near Boesinghe, 28 July 1917, during the Third Battle of Ypres. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

the consequences of which were potentially disastrous.

At sea, Berlin announced the reintroduction of unrestricted submarine warfare during 1917. When this policy had been in force earlier in the conflict, the United States of America had been driven to the verge of declaring war on Germany following the killing of numbers of its civilians. That this might again be the case was perfectly understood in Berlin, but the

LEFT: An artist's impression of the hand-to-hand fighting near the windmill at Gavrelle, during the Battle of Arras, on 28-29 April 1917. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

Kaiser and his advisors believed that the UK could be starved into submission long before the Americans could intervene effectively in the war. So the risk was taken and, once again, all ships, neutral or otherwise, became targets of the U-boats.

President Wilson responded as expected. The USA declared war on Germany on 6 April. Though Wilson cited the return to unrestricted warfare as the reason for the US decision, his hand was in part forced by the revelations in an intercepted telegram sent by German Foreign Minister, Arthur Zimmermann, to the Mexican Government, promising it the recovery of lost territory in ▸▸

Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona if Mexico would declare war on the US. With such provocation, President Wilson had little choice but to take up arms. Britain and France may have lost one ally but they had gained a far stronger one.

Shipping losses due to the actions of the German submarines certainly exacerbated the food situation in Britain. In March 1917 alone, twenty-five per cent of all the ships in-bound to the UK were sunk, and Prime Minister Lloyd George was compelled to appeal to unions and employers alike to cease restrictive practices which were hampering Britain's ship-building industry. If British ship yards could not increase production to meet the losses at sea, Britain might indeed be forced to withdraw from the war.

It was those working on the Home Front, in the munitions factory at Silvertown in London, that hit the newspaper headlines in January 1917. In what was the largest explosion ever recorded in the capital, seventy-three people were killed and many others injured when TNT in the Brunner Mond's purification works ignited.

A similar explosion took place in June at the Hooley Hill Munitions Factory at Ashton-under-Lyne. Five tons of TNT ignited causing two nearby gasometers to also catch fire. The result was the deaths of forty-six people and injury to hundreds more.

London also experienced its first bomber attack in September. The slow-moving airships had proven to be too easy a target for fast interceptor fighters, and October 1917 saw the last such raid upon the capital. However, the lumbering Zeppelins were superseded by fast, multi-engine bombers, and Londoners again saw death falling from the skies, delivered by Gothas and Giants.

The Royal Flying Corps had already formed its first night bomber squadron, as aircraft

A memorial erected on Vimy Ridge to honour those who fell there during the fighting in 1917. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

became of increasing importance. Aerial observation over enemy lines had been the original function of the flimsy aeroplanes of 1914, and this as still seen as one of the RFC's primary roles, though at first little regard was paid to the imprecise observations of the airmen. By 1917 every offensive action was preceded by a battle for control of the air, with aircraft able to not only identify enemy positions and spot for the artillery, but also able to carry out attacks themselves with their increasingly heavy bomb loads.

The increased capabilities of aircraft were exemplified by the first-ever sinking of a German submarine by aircraft alone, on 20 May. Help against the U-boat menace also came from the US Navy, following Wilson's declaration of war, with the arrival in May of a number of destroyers to operate alongside their Royal Navy counterparts. These helped to guard the newly-devised convoys that replaced the lone and highly vulnerable merchant ships crossing the oceans with no close naval protection.

It was destroyers, HMS *Swift* and HMS *Broke*, that engaged two groups of German torpedo boats which, on 20 April, had attacked the vessels patrolling the Dover Barrage. In the ensuing fight the two destroyers drove off the enemy, sinking two of the six German boats in the process.

As the year progressed, so did the fighting on the Western Front. Despite opposition, Haig gained permission to mount yet another large-scale offensive, this time in Flanders, with the objective of capturing the German-held village of Passchendaele vital railway network beyond. The Battle of Passchendaele, the Third Battle of Ypres, proved to be every bit as bad as the Somme. In the most appalling conditions, the men fought and died in a sea of mud and muck, blood and bullets. Despite appeals from his senior generals, Haig refused to halt the fighting until almost half a million men had become casualties, and the ground utterly impassable. It scarcely seemed possible that the horrors of 1916 could be repeated. Although the German Army had also suffered catastrophic casualties and lost the high ground that dominated Ypres, the collapse Haig had believed was imminent had not occurred. There would be more fighting, and more deaths, in the year to come.

Arising from the midst of all the death and destruction of the war, was a movement to respect and remember those that had lost their lives in the conflict. This took the form of the Imperial War Graves Commission which was established by Royal Charter in May 1917 to record and care for all the known graves of the fallen. If there is one thing to celebrate from the year of 1917, it is that it saw the creation of the most enduring and uplifting memorial to the sacrifices of a generation. In the form of what is today is the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the dead of both world wars are respectfully honoured. It is because of the CWGC that we will indeed remember them.

BELOW: German prisoners help to carry casualties away from the front, while Canadian soldiers bring forward duckboards, or trench mats, made of wood overlaid with wire mesh, November 1917. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

FOR VALOUR

THE VICTORIA CROSS
MECHANICAL MEN'S WATCH

YOURS FOR JUST £25.99 NOW,
followed by four further interest-free instalments of £25.99

IN 2016, we commemorate the 100th anniversary of WWI – a conflict known as the Great War, from which courageous heroes emerged. The highest award for valour that a British serviceman can achieve, the Victoria Cross was presented to 627 WWI participants. Now you can wear a tribute to the Victoria Cross and each gallant hero with a limited edition chronograph watch, officially endorsed by the Lest We Forget Association.

This precision watch has everything: a rose gold-plated casing and buckle, genuine leather strap and bronze-toned laurel leaves of victory, in addition to the exposed mechanical movement. The cream-toned face is also adorned with a design inspired by the Victoria Cross, and a maroon-toned stripe reminiscent of the ribbon from which the medal suspends. The casing rear is engraved with a tribute to the Victoria Cross' heritage, an image of Queen Victoria and a depiction of the medal itself.

Only 4,999 of these watches will be available. To validate the limited edition, each will be engraved on the reverse with a unique edition number. Applications are now open and this offer is likely to attract great interest, and not just from watch collectors, so please apply promptly.

KEY DETAILS

Limited Release: Only 4,999 watches are available. Each is etched on the reverse with the individual edition number. The earlier your order, the lower your watch number will be.

Fully Endorsed By: The Lest We Forget Association (charity number 1162122).

Design: Featuring an exposed mechanical movement, the watch face design is inspired by the Victoria Cross. This watch will feature rose gold-plated casing and leather strap.

YOURS FOR ONLY £129.95 (plus £9.99 S&H)* – subject to availability. That's only five interest-free instalments of £25.99 each. Pay nothing now.

Watch face (inc. casing) measures 1.65 inches (4.2 cm) in diameter. Strap measures 7 inches 18 cm) in length x 0.75 inch (2 cm) in width.

Casing rear features a tribute to the Victoria Cross' heritage, an image of Queen Victoria – the monarch who introduced the medal, an engraved depiction of the Cross and the unique edition number

FORMAL APPLICATION: THE 'VICTORIA CROSS' MECHANICAL MEN'S WATCH

DO NOT SEND ANY PAYMENT WITH THIS APPLICATION:
if successful, you will be notified in writing within 7 days

YES, I wish to apply for _____ (Qty) of the *'Victoria Cross' Mechanical Men's Watch* for just £129.95 – that's only 5 interest-free instalments of £25.99 (plus £9.99 S&H)*, subject to availability. Each will be limited to just 4,999 editions, engraved on the reverse with the unique **edition number and accompanied by both** a Certificate of Authenticity and a custom-designed presentation case – free of charge.

I do not need to send any money now. If my application is successful I will be notified in writing within 7 days. I understand the watch is covered by your 120-day money-back guarantee. I confirm I am 18 years or over.

To apply now, send the coupon below. For priority, call now, on
0333 003 0019
Lines open Mon-Fri 9.00am – 8.00pm and Sat 9.00am – 5.30pm.

Send this coupon to: THE BRADFORD EXCHANGE LTD, PO BOX 653, STOKE-ON-TRENT, ST4 4RA

Order reference: P333014	Apply by telephone on **0333 003 0019**	Apply online at **www.bradford.co.uk**
Title	☐ Mr ☐ Mrs ☐ Ms ☐ Miss ☐ Other_____	
Name		
Address		
Postcode		
Telephone	(0)	
Mobile		
Email	Please note, we may contact you via email with information about your order	
Signature		

This 'Victoria Cross' Mechanical Men's Watch has been endorsed by the Lest We Forget Association (charity number 1162122). Applicants must be aged 18 years of age or over. * S&H - Service and Handling. UK mainland addresses only. A credit check may be carried out by a licensed Credit Reference Agency. Please note, we may contact you via email and mobile with information about your reservation and other relevant offers. From time to time, the Bradford Exchange may allow carefully screened third party companies to contact you. Please tick the boxes if you do not wish to receive such communications by:Email ☐ Telephone/Mobile ☐ Third Party Companies ☐ 526-FAN17.01

NEW YEAR'S HONOURS

1 JANUARY 1917

On the first day of 1917, the publication of New Year Honours included, as might be expected in time of war, awards to many senior military figures. Possibly the most notable was the promotion of General Haig to the rank of Field Marshal. King George had wanted Haig to be promoted for some time, both to enhance his standing within the Allied armies as well as demonstrate support for him against his critics. Richard Haldane, the former Secretary at State for War, was also pleased with the recognition Haig had received. 'You are the only military leader we possess with the power to think, which the enemy possess in a highly developed form,' Haldane told Haig in early January. 'The necessity of a trained mind, and of the intellectual equipment which it carries is at last recognised among our people. In things other than military they have, alas, most things still to learn, but in the science and art of war a trying experience has dictated the necessity of a gift such as yours won by the hard toil of the spirit.'

On hearing of the news, Haig wrote to the King, expressing his gratitude: 'I must confess that I realise I have attained this great position in the Army, not by my own merits, but thanks to the splendid soldierly qualities of our Officers and men. And I cannot find words to express the pride I feel at having Your Majesty's confidence, and at the privilege which has been given to me to command such Officers and such soldiers.' As almost half a million of those officers and men had been killed executing Haig's instructions, the new Field Marshal was only stating what the peoples of the UK and its colonies knew to be the stark reality – and for them there were no such glittering awards.

Haig's promotion was just one of several others announced in the Honours list, many of which were the result of the successful conclusion of the Battle of the Somme. This was portrayed in *The Times* on 1 January, which declared, ignoring the great commanders of the past, that 'no British soldier ever earned the title better'. The reporter went on to add: 'Great satisfaction will be felt both in the Army abroad and at home by the news that the King has been pleased to approve the promotion of General Sir Douglas Haig to the rank of Field-Marshal ... The promotions are also gazetted of Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Rawlinson and Major-General Sir Hubert Gough, commanding the Fourth and Fifth Armies respectively, to whose brilliant leadership the successes on the Somme are largely due.'

The Times also noted that 'additional honours and commendations [were] conferred for service in the Battle of Jutland on May 31 last, and awards are also made for bravery and devotion to duty during nine-sweeping operations, to submarine petty officers and men, and for miscellaneous services'.

ABOVE: General Sir Henry Rawlinson (on the left) chats with a French War Correspondent later in 1917. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

ABOVE: Field Marshal Haig reviewing troops in Canterbury, Kent. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

MOTTERSHEAD VC

7 JANUARY 1917

ABOVE: The crew of a FE.2d demonstrate their positions. The pilot is furthest from the camera, his observer in front, in this case showing the use of the rear-firing Lewis gun which required him to stand.

Born in Widnes, Lancashire, on 17 January 1892 Thomas Mottershead enlisted in the Royal Flying Corps as a mechanic shortly after the outbreak of war. It was not until May 1916 that he began his pilot's training, obtaining his flying certificate the following month.

Mottershead was eventually posted to No.20 Squadron which was equipped with the Royal Aircraft Factory FE.2. In his book *Heroes of the Skies*, Lord Ashcroft details a little of Mottershead's time with the squadron: 'For the next five months, he was on almost continual operational service but he was given two weeks' leave over Christmas 1916 which he spent with his family. He even found time to visit his former school and give pupils a talk on his work in France, before returning to 20 Squadron early in 1917.

'On 7 January 1917, Mottershead was the pilot of one of two FEs that were ordered to carry out a fighter patrol over Ploegsteert Wood, Belgium. When his aircraft was found to be unserviceable, he transferred to a reserve FE2d, but he and his observer [Lieutenant W.E. Gower] soon caught up with their fellow aircrew.'

No sooner had Mottershead reached his patrol area, then his aircraft was attacked at an altitude of 9,000 feet by two Albatros D.III fighters of Jasta 8. Gower immediately opened fire and managed to hit one of the attackers, putting it out of the action. The remaining German aircraft, which, some accounts state, was flown by German Ace *Leutnant* Walter *Göttsch*, had more luck.

'The second Albatros manoeuvred itself on the tail of Mottershead's aircraft,' continues Lord Ashcroft's account, 'and opened fire at point-blank range. Bullets ruptured the petrol tank and the aircraft, which had a plywood fuselage, burst into flames.'

The London Gazette of 12 February 1917 takes up the story: 'Enveloped in flames, which his observer, Lt. Gower was unable to subdue, this very gallant soldier succeeded in bringing his aeroplane back to our lines, and though he made a successful landing, the machine collapsed on touching the ground, pinning him beneath wreckage ... Though suffering extreme torture from burns, Sjt. Mottershead showed the most conspicuous presence of mind in the careful selection of a landing place, and his wonderful endurance and fortitude undoubtedly saved the life of his observer.'

'Gower helped nearby soldiers to extricate the pilot from the burning wreckage,' adds Lord Ashcroft. 'Despite dreadful burns to his back, hands and legs, Mottershead was able to speak to his rescuers ... For the next five days, surgeons desperately tried to save the pilot's life but Mottershead died on 12 January 1917, five days short of his twenty-fourth birthday.'

Mottershead's award is the only Victoria Cross to be won by a non-commissioned officer of the Royal Flying Corps during the First World War. The VC, to go alongside the Distinguished Conduct Medal awarded for his actions in September 1916, was presented to his widow, Lilian, by King George V in a ceremony in Hyde Park, London, on 2 June 1917.

ABOVE: HMS *Cornwallis* in action earlier in the war – in this case shelling Turkish positions on the Dardanelles, 19 February 1915.

THE LOSS OF HMS CORNWALLIS

9 JANUARY 1917

When the Duncan-class HMS *Cornwallis* slid into the water from the Thames Ironworks and Shipbuilding Company at Leamouth Wharf on 13 July 1901, she was, along with her sister ships, one of the fastest pre-Dreadnought battleships ever built. At 13,745 tons, *Cornwallis*, though lightweight compared with the great battleships of the next generation, was considered a 'first class' battleship and had been designed to compete with the new fast French and Russian battleships.

The six Duncan-class battleships were lightly armoured which helped them to achieve a top speed of nineteen knots. Their main armament consisted of four 12-inch breech-loaders, with twelve 6-inch guns forming their principle secondary weaponry. As it transpired, the Russian ships were not as heavily armed as initially feared, and the Duncan-class warships proved to be quite superior in their balance of speed, firepower, and protection. Apart from the two Swiftsure-class ships, HMS *Swiftsure* and HMS *Triumph*, the Duncan-class battleships could outpace any of their contemporaries.

Due to labour disputes *Cornwallis* was not commissioned until February 1904, the battleship then joining the Royal Navy's Mediterranean Fleet. In 1906 she transferred to the Channel Fleet followed by deployment to the Atlantic Fleet in February the following year.

In August 1909, *Cornwallis* transferred back to the Mediterranean Fleet and was based at Malta. Under a fleet reorganization on 1 May 1912, the Mediterranean Fleet battle squadron became the 4th Battle Squadron, Home Fleet, based at Gibraltar rather than Malta, and *Cornwallis* thus became a Home Fleet unit at Gibraltar. By the time war broke out in 1914 she was part of the 6th Battle Squadron based at Portland, but now very much of the second rank of battleships, and had been reduced to a skeleton crew. Whilst *Cornwallis* would not be able to match the firepower of the Dreadnoughts, her speed meant that she could be used to make up for the Royal Navy's perceived need for more cruisers, and so a role was still found for her and her surviving sister ships.

She was tasked with bombarding German submarine bases in Belgium before heading off to the Dardanelles in 1915. After the evacuation from Gallipoli, *Cornwallis* remained in the Eastern Mediterranean, and it was whilst she was sailing some sixty nautical miles east of Malta that disaster struck.

It was on 9 January 1917 that *Cornwallis* was spotted by *Kapitänleutnant* Kurt Hartwig, in command of *U-32*. Attacking from the battleship's starboard side, Hartwig fired two torpedoes. The first hit *Cornwallis*, causing flooding in her stokeholds, resulting in a starboard list of about ten degrees. The list was corrected by counter-flooding but seventy-five minutes after the first torpedo had struck, another torpedo hit her, again on the starboard side.

The stricken old battleship rolled over to starboard and sank approximately half-an-hour later. Those precious thirty minutes or so enabled all the crew to leave the ship with the exception of fifteen men who had been killed by the torpedo explosions.

BELOW: **The Duncan-class pre-Dreadnought battleship HMS *Cornwallis*.** (BOTH IMAGES HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

THE SILVERTOWN DISASTER

19 JANUARY 1917

In response to the 'Shell Scandal' of 1915, the British government established new munitions factories around the country. This included a plant for the purification of Trinitrotoluene (TNT) at the Brunner Mond chemical factory at Silvertown that stretched some 400 yards between the North Woolwich Railway and the River Thames.

On the evening of 19 January 1917, there were eighty-three tons of TNT at the plant at various stages in the purification process. Behind the factory were the flour mills of W. Vernon & Sons and the Venesta plywood and packaging case works. A little to the east were the oil refineries of Silvertown Lubricants Limited and the saw-mill and creosote works of Messrs. Burt, Boulton & Haywood. To the west stretched Lyle's sugar factory. Almost 5,000 workers were compacted into that small area, each 'doing their bit' for the war effort.

At around 18.40 hours that evening, hoist workers Betty Sands and Ada Randall decided to take their evening tea break. They left the building and made their way to the toilets. At this point the girls heard what they later described as a noise like the 'shaking of a door', followed by another similar sound. Betty asked Ada to go and find out what was happening. Just moments later a terrified Ada rushed back, screaming: 'Good God, it's all afire!'

Fireman J.J. Betts was on night duty at Silvertown Fire Station: 'Suddenly, without warning, a bright orange tongue of flame shot up from the very heart of the Brunner Mond works high into the air, all the more vivid on account of the enveloping blackness of the night.'

Into the Fire Station rushed one of Betts' colleagues: 'Brunner Mond's alight!' he shouted. No one knew better than the Silvertown firemen the terrible implications conveyed by that brief warning. Within seconds fire alarms rang through the station and the Fire Chief rapped out his orders.

'Outside the fire station people stood transfixed as though fascinated by that now fiercely burning building across the way,' continued Betts. 'Others were fleeing helter-skelter anyhow – anywhere from that flaring presage of imminent danger, yelling warnings as they went. Some lay flat on their faces on the pavement, some prayed against walls of the street."

As they entered the yard with their fire »

ABOVE: Demolished dwellings in Fort Street, previously occupied by Silvertown's firemen and their families, photographed following the explosion. This is stated to be the location of No.2 Fort Street. The fire station was located at the southern end of Fort Street at its junction with North Woolwich Road.

BELOW: Silvertown Fire Station in the aftermath of the explosion. Built in 1914 on North Woolwich Road, the fire station was located virtually on the opposite side of the road to the Brunner Mond works. The site remains in use by London Fire Brigade to this day. (ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF AFTER THE BATTLE UNLESS STATED OTHERWISE)

POLICE CONSTABLE EDWARD GEORGE GREENOFF

Hidden away in Postman's Park, a public space in central London, a short distance north of St Paul's Cathedral and the site of the former head office of the General Post Office (from which the park derives its name), is the Memorial to Heroic Self Sacrifice. First proposed by painter and sculptor George Frederic Watts in 1887, the memorial was unveiled, in an uncompleted state, in 1900. It commemorates ordinary people who died saving the lives of others and who might otherwise have been forgotten. One of the names on the memorial is that of Police Constable Edward George Greenoff, who helped to evacuate the Brunner Mond factory. Then, aware of the danger he was facing, Greenoff remained outside to warn passers-by of the risk of an explosion. When that explosion did take place, the head injuries he suffered proved fatal; he died nine days later, aged 30. He was posthumously awarded the King's Police Medal. (COURTESY OF SIMON TAYLOR)

engine they were met by the factory's Scottish timekeeper running the other way. 'Run for it, mon, we'll be gone in a minute!' he cried as he ran past the firemen, his face distorted by fear. They were his last words.

'Then it was as though heaven had giddily plunged to meet the earth in a shattering upheaval,' Betts later recalled. 'In one second the whole world seemed to have crumbled.'

The *Stratford Express* reported on the explosion: 'The whole heavens were lit in awful splendour. A fiery glow seemed to have come over the dark and miserable January evening, and objects which a few minutes before had been blotted out in the intense darkness were silhouetted against the sky. That awful illumination lasted only a few seconds. Gradually it died away, but down by the river roared a huge column of flame which told thousands that the explosion had been followed by fire and havoc, the like of which has never been known in these parts.'

All nine factories in the area had caught alight to one degree or another, ignited by red-hot iron girders which, flung sky-high by the explosion, had landed upon them. Such was the force of the explosion, parts of Betts' fire engine were found a quarter-of-a-mile away. Almost every building in London was shaken by the explosion. Around half a million windows in shops and houses across the river a mile away, at Charlton and South Woolwich, were shattered. The explosion was reportedly heard as far away as Salisbury and King's Lynn.

A photograph of the rear of the houses in Fort Street that was taken looking south in the days after the blast – note the fire station in the background.

LEFT: A Policeman on duty outside No.6 Fort Street – note that some of the windows have been boarded up. Fireman J.J. Betts would later recall that 'in many cases the roofs and bedrooms had just disappeared. Only parts of the walls of the downstairs rooms were left. These rooms were no longer rooms: they had no ceilings; their fronts had vanished.'

There were many heart-rending scenes during that day. 'Sometimes,' continued Betts, 'a distracted mother in search of a missing child would push herself to the forefront of a group of searchers and herself claw at the pile of rubble in a frenzy of apprehension, until her fingers bled ... One man dragged four badly injured young children from the wreckage of a demolished house, and it was not until afterwards, when he suddenly sank into unconsciousness, that those around realized that he had himself lost a foot.' Such scenes, Betts observed, were frequent.

What caused the fire at Brunner Mond was never satisfactorily established. A Government inquiry was instigated and a number of likely causes were identified but no evidence was found of the fire being caused maliciously.

What was abundantly clear, as should have been apparent from the outset, was that a TNT purification factory should never have been established in the middle of a densely-populated urban area. Thousands of houses were destroyed along with nearly a dozen factories. The damage amounted to £1,212,661 – around £60m today. Subsequent third party claims ran into many millions more.

As it happened, and considering the scale of the disaster, the list of fatalities was relatively low. Sixty-nine people were killed instantly

ABOVE: In 1920, the directors of Brunner Mond commissioned a memorial to commemorate those men and women from the Silvertown factory that gave their lives during the First World War – either on active service or those "who whilst serving their country by making T.N.T. perished in the explosion in these works, January 19th 1917". It stands under the Docklands Light Railway on North Woolwich Road. (COURTESY OF DANNY ROBINSON)

and four more later died in hospital. All the workers still inside the munitions factory at the time of the explosion were killed, some having managed to escape when the fire was first observed. A further ninety-eight people were seriously injured and more than 900 suffered minor injuries.

The explosion at Brunner Mond's Silvertown factory remains the largest ever recorded in London.

A HISTORY OF CONFLICT

BRITAIN AT WAR

Your favourite magazine is also available digitally.

DOWNLOAD THE APP NOW FOR FREE.

GRAF SPEE: DEATH & SALVAGE OF GERMAN CRUISER
A HISTORY OF CONFLICT
BRITAIN AT WAR
'A DULL RED GLOW'
THE PEN MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD

FREE APP
with sample issue
IN APP ISSUES £3.99

SUBSCRIBE & SAVE
Monthly £2.99
6 issues £19.99
12 issues £34.99

SEARCH: Britain at war

Read on your iPhone & iPad | Android | PC & Mac | kindle fire | Blackberry | Windows 10

ALSO AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD

SEARCH
AVIATION NEWS

FREE APP
with sample issue
IN APP ISSUES £3.99

SEARCH
FLYPAST

FREE APP
with sample issue
IN APP ISSUES £3.99

FREE Aviation Specials App

IN APP ISSUES
£3.99

Simply download to purchase digital versions of your favourite aviation specials in one handy place! Once you have the app, you will be able to download new, out of print or archive specials for less than the cover price!

SEARCH:
Aviation Specials

How it Works.

Simply download the Britain at War app and receive your sample issue completely free. Once you have the app, you will be able to download new or back issues (from December 2011 onwards) for less than newsstand price or, alternatively, subscribe to save even more!

Don't forget to register for your Pocketmags account. This will protect your purchase in the event of a damaged or lost device. It will also allow you to view your purchases on multiple platforms.

Available on iTunes | Available on the App Store | Available on Google play | Available on BlackBerry | Available on kindle fire | Available on PC, Mac & Windows10

Available on PC, Mac, Blackberry, Windows 10 and kindle fire from pocketmags.com

Requirements for app: registered iTunes account on Apple iPhone 3G, 3GS, 4S, 5, 6, 6s, iPod Touch or iPad 1, 2, 3 or 4, iPad Air, iPad Mini. Internet connection required for initial download. Published by Key Publishing Ltd. The entire contents of these titles are © copyright 2016. All rights reserved. App prices subject to change. 868/16

ABOVE: Arthur Zimmermann (1864-1940) served as State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Germany between 1916 and 1917. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

THE ZIMMER

With Germany increasingly being forced onto the defensive, and with its chances of a successful outcome to the war through military means diminishing with the passing of each month, the German Foreign Minister, Arthur Zimmermann, advocated a resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare. He believed that an all-out effort to disrupt goods being shipped into the UK would break Britain's resolve and force the UK to seek peace. Though the German Chancellor was against the proposal, Zimmermann was supported by both Hindenburg and Ludendorff.

It was accepted that the change of policy might result in the United States declaring war upon Germany, as had so nearly been the case during the previous period of unrestricted submarine warfare following the sinking of a number of ships carrying American civilians including, most notably *Lusitania*. However, it was argued in Berlin that it would take many months before the US would react and even longer before the Americans could assemble an expeditionary force that could act effectively on the Western Front. Before then Britain would be starved into surrender.

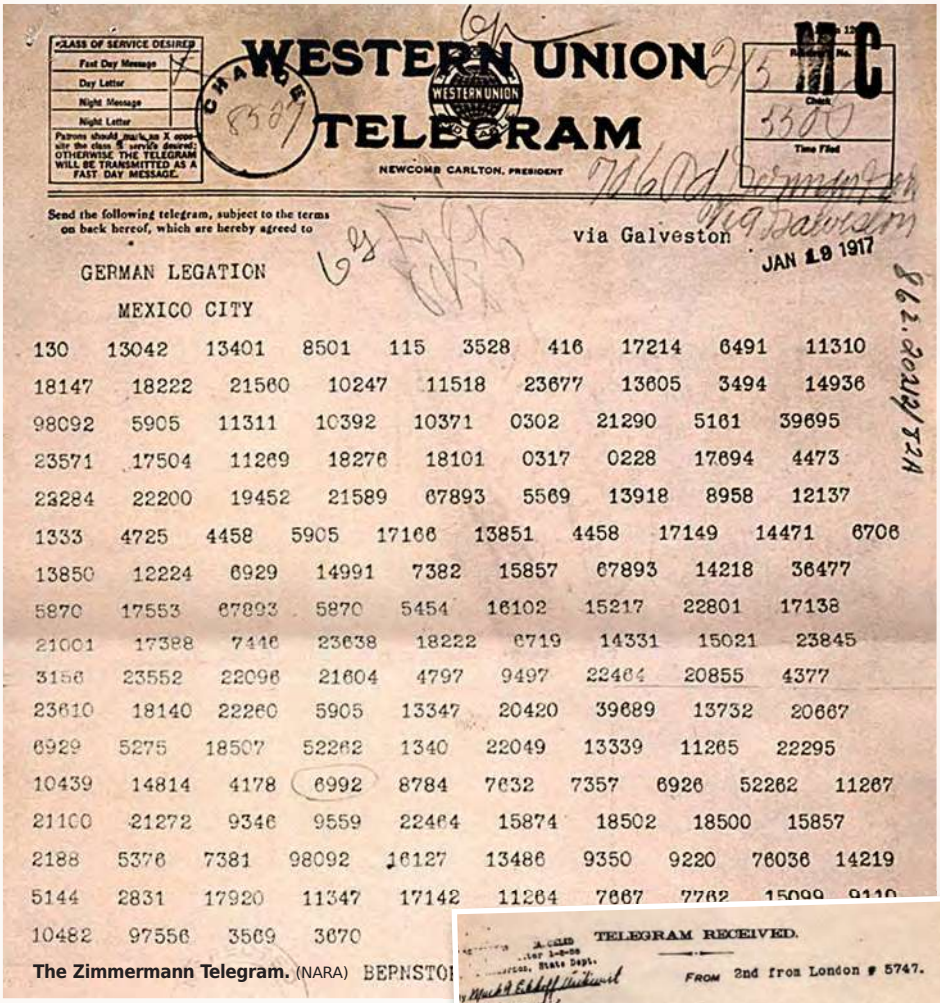
Zimmermann also came up with a plan to distract the Americans if they did declare war on Germany. This plan was to persuade Mexico to attack the US! Incredible though this may seem, the idea was forwarded by Zimmermann on 16 January 1917, to the German ambassador in Washington for the latter to pass on to the German ambassador in Mexico, Heinrich von Eckardt. The telegram read as follows:

'We intend to begin on the first of February unrestricted submarine warfare. We shall endeavor in spite of this to keep the United States of America neutral. In the event of this not succeeding, we make Mexico a proposal of alliance on the following basis: make war together, make peace together, generous financial support and an understanding on our part that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The settlement in detail is left to you.

'You will inform the [Mexican] President of the above most secretly as soon as the outbreak of war with the United States of America is certain and add the suggestion that he should, on his own initiative, invite Japan to immediate adherence and at the same time mediate between Japan and ourselves. Please call the President's attention to the fact that the ruthless employment of our submarines now offers the prospect of compelling England in a few months to make peace.'

As it happened, von Eckardt was not the only one who read the relayed telegram from Zimmerman. The reason for this was that long before the start of the war, the Committee of Imperial Defence had decided that in the event of hostilities with Germany, its submarine cables should be destroyed. Consequently, in August 1914 Germany's trans-Atlantic cables, and those running between Britain and Germany, were cut. Immediately there was an increase in messages sent via cables belonging to other countries and messages sent by wireless.

The latter could be intercepted by the Royal Navy's wireless stations, by installations belonging to the Post Office and Marconi, and by individuals with access to wireless



WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM

NEWCOMB CARLTON, PRESIDENT

Send the following telegram, subject to the terms on back hereof, which are hereby agreed to

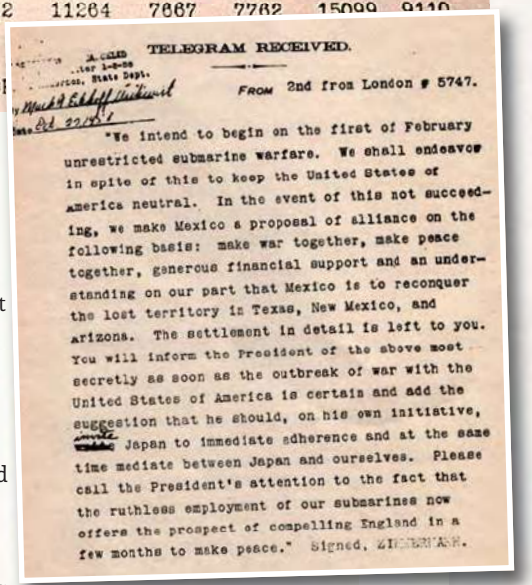
via Galveston

JAN 19 1917

GERMAN LEGATION
MEXICO CITY

130 13042 13401 8501 115 3528 416 17214 6491 11310
18147 18222 21560 10247 11518 23677 13605 3494 14936
98092 5905 11311 10392 10371 0302 21290 5161 39695
23571 17504 11269 18276 18101 0317 0228 17694 4473
23284 22200 19452 21589 67893 5569 13918 8958 12137
1333 4725 4458 5905 17166 13851 4458 17149 14471 6706
13850 12224 6929 14991 7382 15857 67893 14218 36477
5870 17553 67893 5870 5454 16102 15217 22801 17138
21001 17388 7446 23638 18222 6719 14331 15021 23845
3156 23552 22096 21604 4797 9497 22464 20855 4377
23610 18140 22260 5905 13347 20420 39689 13732 20667
6929 5275 18507 52262 1340 22049 13339 11265 22295
10439 14814 4178 6992 8784 7632 7357 6926 52262 11267
21100 21272 9346 9559 22464 15874 18502 18500 15857
2188 5376 7381 98092 16127 13486 9350 9220 76036 14219
5144 2831 17920 11347 17142 11264 7667 7762 15099 9110
10482 97556 3569 3670

The Zimmermann Telegram. (NARA) BERNSTO



TELEGRAM RECEIVED.

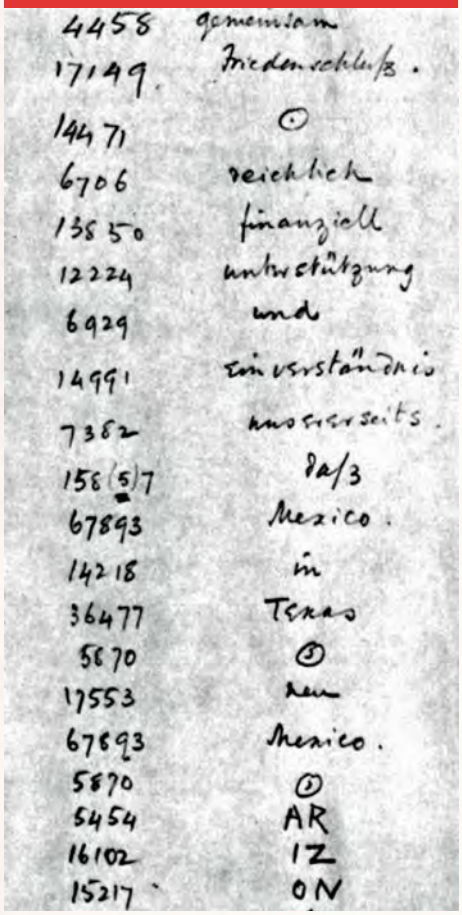
FROM 2nd from London # 5747.

"We intend to begin on the first of February unrestricted submarine warfare. We shall endeavor in spite of this to keep the United States of America neutral. In the event of this not succeeding, we make Mexico a proposal of alliance on the following basis: make war together, make peace together, generous financial support and an understanding on our part that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The settlement in detail is left to you. You will inform the President of the above most secretly as soon as the outbreak of war with the United States of America is certain and add the suggestion that he should, on his own initiative, invite Japan to immediate adherence and at the same time mediate between Japan and ourselves. Please call the President's attention to the fact that the ruthless employment of our submarines now offers the prospect of compelling England in a few months to make peace." Signed, ZIMMERMANN.

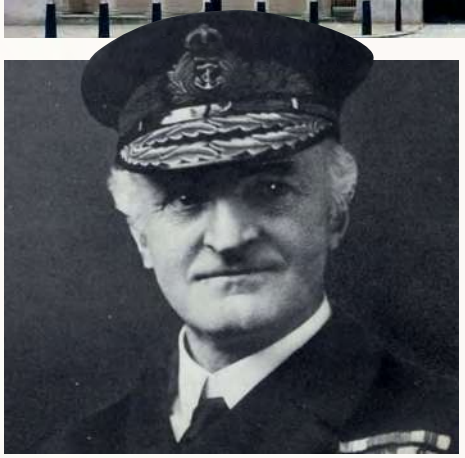
ABOVE: A version of the decoded Zimmermann Telegram as it appeared in plain text. (NARA)

MANN TELEGRAM

19 JANUARY 1917



ABOVE: Part of the Zimmermann Telegram as it was decoded by the cryptographers of Room 40. Because Arizona had only been admitted to the U.S. in 1912, the word "Arizona" was not in the German codebook and had therefore to be split into phonetic syllables.



ABOVE: The Old Admiralty in Whitehall, or the Ripley building as it was officially known, was built in 1726. At the start of the First World War it became the home of Room 40. This organisation was located in the northern section of the first floor, on the same corridor as the boardroom and First Sea Lord's office. (COURTESY OF ROBERT MITCHELL)

LEFT: Admiral Sir William Reginald 'Blinker' Hall, KCMG, CB, RN, was the Director of Naval Intelligence from October 1914 (taking over from Captain Henry Oliver) through to 1919. Together with the physicist and engineer Sir James Alfred Ewing, Hall was responsible for establishment of the Royal Navy's code-breaking operation, Room 40.

equipment. As it happened, until America's entry into the war, the Germans had been permitted to make limited use of its communication systems, including its trans-Atlantic cables. It was by this method that the telegram was sent, via Washington and unusually in code, to von Eckardt in Mexico, on 19 January 1917. That message was transmitted via the US cable which ran through a relay station at Porthcurno in Cornwall, from where all such messages were copied to British intelligence.

Interception, though, was no use without the means of decoding and interpretation, and an organisation had to be set up to Britain to do this. Under the leadership of Rear Admiral Henry Oliver (and later Reginald 'Blinker' Hall) of the Admiralty Intelligence Division a secret intelligence-gathering and processing department was established in August 1914 in Room 40 in a quiet part of the old Admiralty buildings in London.

Little successful deciphering took place in the first few weeks of the war. A breakthrough came later in August 1914, and then in October, when two codebooks captured from the Germans came into British hands. Once the cipher and code were known, a 'pianola', or punched card machine, was used to decode messages. One officer was made responsible for to studying all the decoded intercepts, current and past, and to compare them continually with what actually took place 'in order to penetrate the German mind.'

There was a vast increase in traffic as the war progressed, which required a corresponding increase in the personnel in Room 40, as well as in funding. Over time, and despite changes in the codes by the Germans, Room 40 was able to rapidly interpret the German messages.

When the message to von Eckardt was intercepted, the Admiralty's personnel in Room 40 were soon at work on the German telegram. Much of it had been read by the following day. Though disclosure of the Telegram would obviously sway public opinion in the United States against Germany, provided the Americans could be convinced it was genuine, the Room 40 chief, William Reginald Hall, was reluctant to let it out. He was of the opinion that its disclosure would expose the German codes broken in Room 40 and British eavesdropping on the United States cable. In the ensuing delay, a cover story was developed under which the British could claim that their agents had stolen the telegram's deciphered text in Mexico. Finally, on 19 February, Hall showed the Telegram to Edward Bell, secretary of the United States Embassy in London.

Though the Mexican President, Venustiano Carranza, had assigned a military commission to assess the feasibility of the Mexican takeover of their former territories as contemplated by Germany, it was quickly concluded that it would be neither possible nor even desirable to attempt such an enterprise. The Mexicans, therefore, sensibly refused to have anything to do with the proposal – but unfortunately for Zimmerman the telegram was published in its entirety by the US press on 1 March 1917.

The resulting howl of outrage could be heard across the United States, if not the world. A month later President Woodrow Wilson declared war on Germany. ●

THE LOSS OF THE SS LAURENTIC

25 JANUARY 1917

On 25 January 1917, the 14,892-ton liner *Laurentic*, which had been converted into an Armed Auxiliary Cruiser, was en route from Liverpool for Halifax, Nova Scotia, when she struck two German mines off Lough Swilly in County Donegal, Ireland. Lough Swilly was an important naval anchorage during the war with Fanad Head protecting its western shore. At the time, *Laurentic*, under the command of Captain Reginald A. Norton RN, had deviated from her intended course to drop off a number of its crew members, who had been showing signs of fever, at Buncrana.

Soon after putting back to sea, and about an hour out from Buncrana, the liner hit the mines off Fanad Head, as Captain Norton subsequently recounted: 'The vessel left port at 5 o'clock on the afternoon of Jan. 25 carrying a complement of 470. At 5.55 I was on the bridge when a violent explosion occurred abreast the foremast on the port side, followed twenty seconds later by a similar explosion abreast the engine room on the port side. Nothing was seen in the water prior to the explosion. The ship was steaming at full speed ahead. No lights were showing.

'I ordered full speed astern, fired a rocket, gave the order to turn out the boats, and tried to send a wireless call for help, but found that the second explosion had stopped the dynamo.'

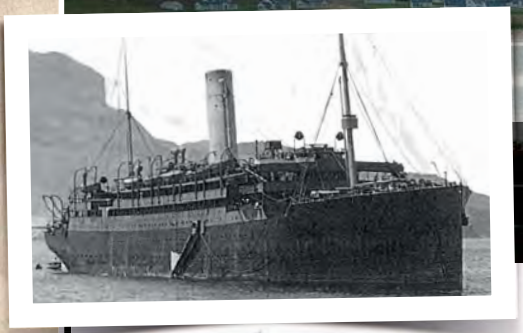
Gradually the stricken liner slipped beneath the waves. There had been time, though, to prepare the lifeboats. Though the wireless installation equipment had been destroyed by the explosions, rockets calling for help were sent up. These were seen by lighthouse men on the Irish coast, and 'in a few minutes a number of mine sweepers were on their way to the scene'. Sadly, of those on board, 354 passengers and crew were lost – twelve officers and 109 men were saved. The real tragedy in this incident, however, is the fact that most of these casualties occurred *after* the ship had sunk.

One account published in the days after the sinking stated: 'All the men got away safely in the boats. The best of order prevailed after the explosion. Officers and men lived up to the best traditions of the Navy. About 45 minutes after the explosion he [Captain Norton] went round the vessel below in company with Mr. Porter, the chief steward, who had an electric torch, and satisfied himself there were no more men on the ship. He then decided to abandon the ship, which was sinking.'

The last to leave his stricken vessel, Captain Norton himself later recalled the following, having completed his inspection: 'The vessel was then very low in the water. When at last I entered a waiting lifeboat bumping dangerously alongside, the ship was sinking, but owing to the darkness and rough weather, we did not actually see her sink.

'Possibly some were killed in the engine room, but I have been unable to ascertain that, owing to the fact that no survivors are left of the men on watch. I know that all the men got up from the stokehold.

'The deaths were all due to exposure, owing



LEFT: ***Laurentic*** **at anchor. Even as recently as July 1987 serious attempts were being made to recover the liner's missing gold ingots, on this occasion using bell divers.**

ABOVE: The SS *Laurentic*. Built by Harland and Wolff at Belfast in 1908, *Laurentic* inaugurated the White Star Line's service from Liverpool to Canada and was one of the largest vessels in the Canada trade.

RIGHT: On Easter Sunday 2010 one of the guns from the SS Laurentic, which had been recovered by the Downings Divers Sub Aqua Club in 2007, was unveiled on the quayside at Downings, Co. Donegal, where it serves as a memorial to those who lost their lives on 25 January 1917. (WWW.SCENESOFDONEGAL.COM)

to the coldness of the night. My own boat was almost full of water when we were picked up by a trawler the next morning, but all the men in the boat survived. Another boat, picked up at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, contained five survivors and fifteen frozen bodies. They had been exposed to the bitter cold for over twenty hours.'

Amongst the passengers on *Laurentic* at the time of the disaster were a number of officials from a British purchasing mission who had been tasked with acquiring stocks of arms and munitions from the US and Canadian governments. To help these individuals achieve their aim, and to pay for the food, steel, and munitions which Britain needed to continue the war against Germany, in the liner's strong rooms were forty-three tons of gold. Amounting to 3,211 separate gold ingots, this part of *Laurentic*'s cargo was valued then at more than £5 million.

Understandably, the Government wanted its gold recovered. It turned to the Royal Navy's specialist diving unit, nicknamed 'The Tin Openers', led by Commander Guybon Chesney Castell Damant CBE. Damant was a famous Navy diver who, nine years before the war, had carried out hazardous research into Haldane's decompression tables for the Admiralty. Damant had held the world deep diving record, of 210 feet, in 1906. At the start of the First World War Damant, though retired, was called back to naval service.

The divers were soon on scene – the entire unit had been ordered to abandon all current tasks (which included diving on sunken U-boats) to concentrate on *Laurentic*. One of the men was Senior Diver Dusty Miller. Author Kendall McDonald has described how, 'on the 14th day of the diving after blasting their way through to the strong room, Miller smashed open its steel door with a sledgehammer and a chisel. On entering he found himself facing stacks of bullion boxes, each weighing 140 pounds. Even though he was over his bottom time, Dusty manhandled one of the boxes back to the deck and the next day on his 60-minute "shift" he got out another three. He had almost single-handedly recovered £32,000 worth of gold!

'However, Dusty Miller was to pay a price for all that gold. Cautious diving had been suspended for the duration and even more so for the *Laurentic* gold recovery. Shortly after his first haul of gold he suffered a bad attack of the "bends" with acute pain in his joints ...

'After a solid week of huge winds and seas, Dusty and the other divers returned to the wreck, and Damant went down himself. He found that the storm had turned, twisted and folded the wreck almost in half. The passage way that Dusty had used to bring up the gold boxes was now only 18 inches high and the depth of the entry point had increased from 62 feet to 103.

'After a week's more work by divers with explosives, Dusty re-entered the strong room. It was empty! All the gold ingots had slipped through holes torn in the walls and floor and had tumbled down into the tangled and twisted wreckage of the bilges. More explosives were used to cut a hole down to the gold's new resting place ... By September the divers had recovered over £800,000.'

After seven years, in which some 5,000 individual dives to the wreck were made, the Admiralty decided to cease operations. Today, twenty or so ingots – valued at up to £8 million – remain at the wreck site, no doubt lying out of reach under sections of the hull or buried in the seabed.

ABOVE: An aerial view of Fanad Head lighthouse – where some of the warning flares fired from *Laurentic* may have been spotted – looking out towards the waters in which the liner sank. Fanad Head is also noted for the naval action in 1798 between English and French vessels that saw the capture of Wolfe Tone. (SHUTTERSTOCK)

OPERATION ALBERICH

9 FEBRUARY 1917

BELOW: British troops clearing felled trees – evidence of the Germans' 'scorched-earth' policy during Operation *Alberich*. (ALL IMAGES HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

It was on 9 February 1917, that the German Army began implementing Operation *Alberich* (Unternehmen *Alberich*) – its strategic withdrawal to the infamous Hindenburg Line. The construction of the Hindenburg Line, a new series of powerful defensive positions east of the Somme battlefront from Arras to Laon, had been ordered in September 1916. By retreating to this line, the Germans eliminated a salient that bulged into the Allied lines between Arras and Saint-Quentin. This shortening of the German front by some twenty-five to thirty miles, it had been calculated, would release as many as thirteen divisions – at this point in the war, even with reinforcements from the Eastern Front, the German forces in the west numbered only 154 divisions against 190 Allied, many of which were larger.

LEFT: During the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line, the dangers that Allied soldiers faced from booby traps were very real. This image, though almost certainly posed, was captioned thus: 'A booby trap nearly bowls over one of our souvenir hunting lads'.

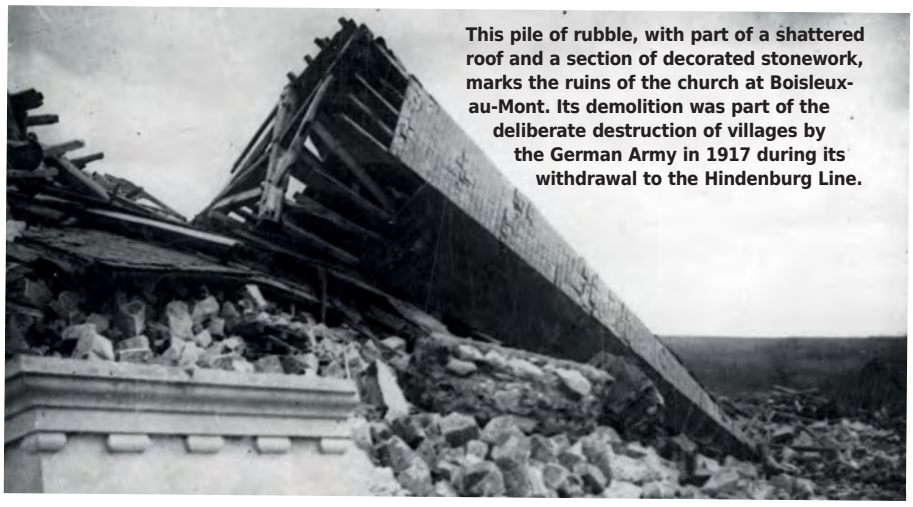
In preparation, German troops, engineers and pioneers began implementing the 'scorched-earth' policy that was to be applied to the ground they were to abandon. Railways and bridges were put out of action, roads were cratered, trees were felled, water sources and wells were polluted or poisoned, towns and villages were destroyed and a large number of mines and booby-traps were planted. Some 125,000 able-bodied French civilians in the region were transported to work elsewhere in occupied France, while children, mothers and the elderly were left behind with minimal rations.

For some time, the British had been aware that the Germans were preparing to withdraw from their most advanced positions and patrols into No Man's Land constantly probed the enemy positions. It was not until the night of 14 March that parts of the German trenches were found to be empty along the Arras salient. Accordingly, British troops moved forward the following day and occupied the abandoned Germans positions.

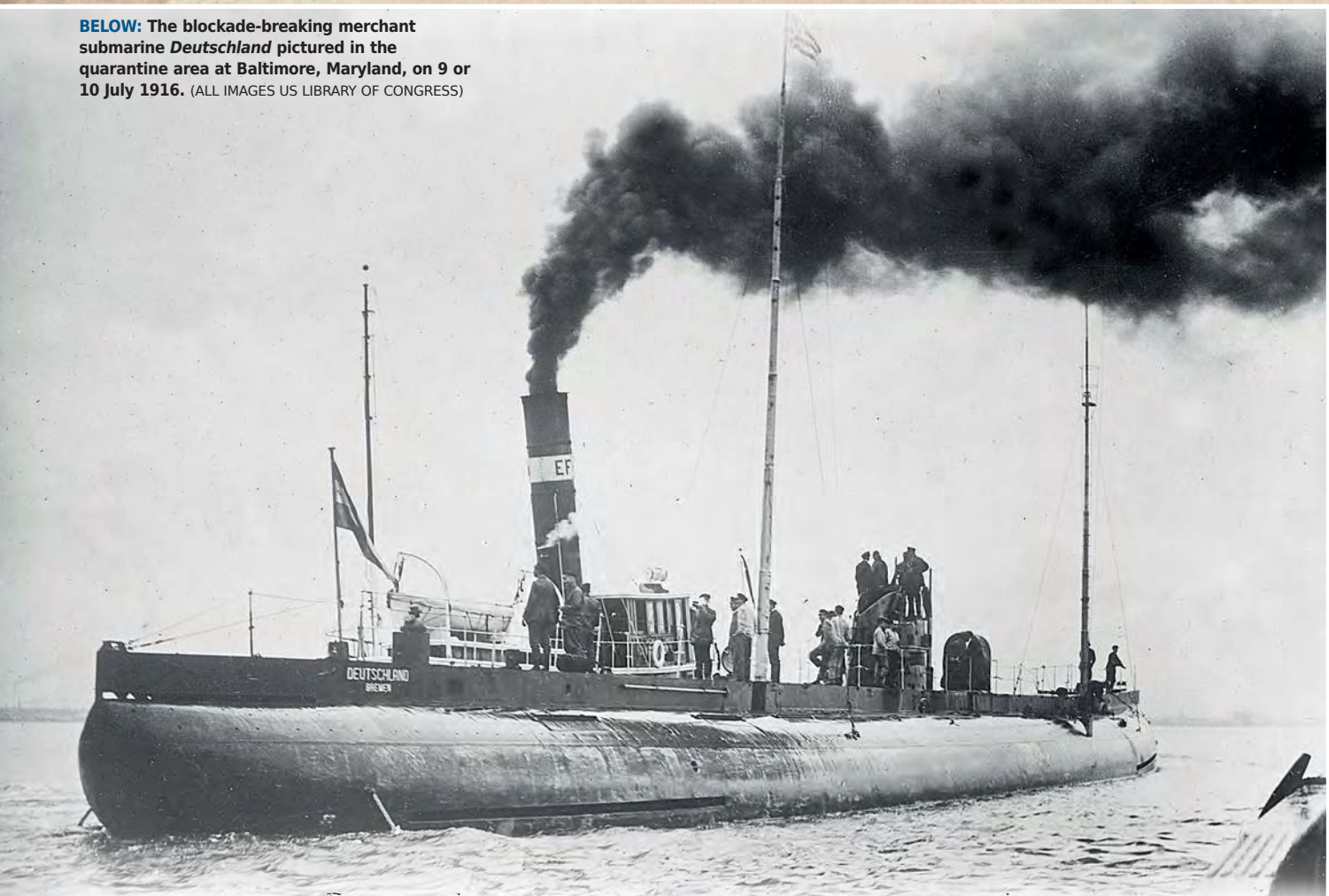
That evening, 15 March, information reached Haig's headquarters indicating that that the German forces on the British front south of the Somme had been reduced. It was also noted that the enemy's line was being held by rear guard detachments supported by machine-guns, whose withdrawal might also be expected at any moment.

By 16 March the greater part of the German withdrawal had been completed, and orders were issued for a general advance along the whole of the British front line as far as the south of Arras to commence on the morning of the 17 March. 'In the course of this advance,' wrote a triumphant Haig, 'the whole intricate system of German defences in this area, consisting of many miles of powerful, well-wired trenches which had been constructed with immense labour and worked on till the last moment, were abandoned by the enemy and passed into the possession of our troops'.

The devastated Somme battlefield had been left behind, with the German Army giving up more French territory than at any time since September 1914. The new German positions, though, were formidable, and the withdrawal had been conducted in text-book fashion. Both sides could claim success. ●



This pile of rubble, with part of a shattered roof and a section of decorated stonework, marks the ruins of the church at Boisleux-au-Mont. Its demolition was part of the deliberate destruction of villages by the German Army in 1917 during its withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line.



BELOW: The blockade-breaking merchant submarine *Deutschland* pictured in the quarantine area at Baltimore, Maryland, on 9 or 10 July 1916. (ALL IMAGES US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

MERCHANT SUBMARINE REQUISITIONED

19 FEBRUARY 1917

An unusual part of Germany's maritime war came to an end on 19 February 1917 when the merchant submarine *Deutschland* was requisitioned by the Imperial German Navy and converted to an operational U-boat.

Whilst Germany had been free to trade with neutral countries such as the United States, at least until the latter's entry into the war, the reality was that the Royal Navy's domination of the world's sea lanes meant that that this was impossible for the Central Powers on any meaningful scale. One innovative solution introduced by the Germans was the merchant submarine.

The original concept for a blockade-breaking merchant submarine was the work of Alfred Lohmann, the then President of the Bremen Chamber of Commerce. With the backing of a number of interested parties, a new company was formed in Germany, Deutsche Ozean-Reederei GMBH, which operated as a subsidiary of Norddeutscher Lloyd. Designs were soon completed and the first orders for the submarines were placed with the shipbuilders Germaniawerft in Kiel. Constructed without armaments, these civilian submarines had a wide beam to provide space for cargo – the latter providing a capacity of roughly 700 tons (230 tons of rubber could be stored in the free-flooding spaces between the inner and outer hulls).

Deutschland was launched on 28 March 1916. On 23 June the same year she sailed on her first voyage to the United States. Her captain was Paul König, who provided this description of the mission: 'We have brought a most valuable cargo of dyestuffs to our American friends, dyestuffs which have been so much needed for months in America and which the ruler of the seas has not allowed the great American Republic to import ...

'Great Britain cannot hinder boats such as ours to go and come as we please. Our trip passing Dover across the ocean was an uneventful one. When danger approached we went below the surface, and here we are, safely in an American port, ready to return in due course.

'I am not in a position to give you full details regarding our trip across the ocean, in view of our enemies. Our boat has a displacement of about 2,000 tons and a speed of more than fourteen knots. Needless to say that we are quite unarmed and only a peaceful merchantman.

'Our boats will carry across the Atlantic the mails and save them from British interruption. We trust that the old friendly relationship with the United States, going ▸▸

back to the days of Washington, when it was Prussia who was the first to help America in its fight for freedom from British rule, will awake afresh in your beautiful and powerful country.

'The house flag of the *Deutsche Ozean Rhederei* is the old Bremen flag-red and white stripes, with the coat of arms of the town, the key in the corner. This key is the sign that we have opened the gates which Great Britain tried to shut up on us and the trade of the world. The gates which we opened with this key will not be shut again. Open door to the trade of the world and freedom of the oceans and equal rights to all nations on the oceans will be guaranteed by Germany's victory in this struggle for our existence.'

ABOVE: The *Deutschland*'s commander, Captain Paul Liebrecht König, with members of his crew on *Deutschland* alongside McLeon Pier at Locust Point, Baltimore, Maryland, on 10 July 1916.

As König stated, he had not given specific details of his cargo on this voyage. It is known, however, that it included 125 tons of highly sought-after chemical dyes, medical drugs (mainly Salvarsan), and even gemstones. Having been at sea just over two weeks, *Deutschland* docked in Baltimore on 9 July 1916 (some sources give this date as the 7th).

The British Government viewed this development in the war at sea with deep concern. In a joint statement with the other Allied governments, it issued a strong protest to the United States. The main gist of the note of protest was thus: 'In the case of submarine vessels, the application of the principles of the law of nations is affected by special and novel conditions. First, by the fact that these vessels can navigate and remain at sea submerged, and can thus escape all control and observation; second, by the fact that it is impossible to identify them and establish their national character, whether neutral or belligerent, combatant or non-combatant, and to remove the capacity for harm inherent in the nature of such vessels.'

Undeterred, the US authorities rejected the British argument. *Deutschland* duly remained at Baltimore until 2 August, at which point she sailed for Bremerhaven, arriving there on 24 August. Her hull was crammed full of valuable cargo, a load which included 341 tons of nickel, ninety-three tons of tin, and 348 tons of crude rubber (257 tons of which were carried outside the pressure hull). Unhindered by the Allied navies, the blockade-breaker had travelled a total of 8,450 nautical miles, 190 of them submerged.

A group photograph of *Deutschland*'s civilian crew at McLeon Pier, Baltimore, on 10 July 1916.

ABOVE: *Deutschland* alongside the Connecticut State Pier in New London. It was there from 1 to 16 November 1916.

BELOW: *U-155*, the former blockade-breaking *Deutschland*, was surrendered to the Royal Navy in November 1918 as part of the terms of the Armistice. She was subsequently put on show in London, when this image was taken.

Such was the success of *Deutschland*'s journey that preparations immediately began for a second cruise. At the same time, a sister submarine, *Bremen* (whose captain was Karl Schwartzkopf), sailed for Norfolk, Virginia, in September. *Bremen*, however, never arrived and her fate remains a mystery to this day.

Despite *Bremen*'s disappearance, *Deutschland* once again sailed for the United States, and more specifically the port of New London in Connecticut, during early November 1916. On board was a cargo that included gems, securities, and medicinal products. After delays caused by an accident with a tug, *Deutschland* set out for home on 21 November 1916, with a cargo that included 6.5 tons of silver bullion.

A third cruise was planned for January 1917. This, however, was abandoned as a result of a deterioration in German-US relations – ironically the result, to a large extent, of the former's submarine warfare. With little other use for *Deutschland*, it was requisitioned by the Imperial German Navy on 17 February 1917. Fitted with torpedo tubes and guns, and renamed *U-155*, she made three successful war cruises, sinking forty-two ships and damaging another, before the Armistice in 1918.

LEFT: King George V inspecting men of the South African Native Labour Contingent in France. At least one survivor from *Mendi's* sinking, Koos Matli of the Bahaduba tribe, recalled meeting the King at Rouen in July 1917: 'One day we were all called together and we went to another ship. On the deck we met King George V and Queen Mary. The King addressed us personally and thanked us for the services we had rendered.' (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

THE MENDI DISASTER

21 FEBRUARY 1917

Located in Hollybrook Cemetery in Southampton, the Hollybrook Memorial commemorates 1,895 servicemen and women of the Commonwealth land and air forces who were lost or buried at sea and who, therefore, have no known grave. Many were lost in vessels torpedoed or mined in UK waters. Indeed, an incredible one third of those listed on the Memorial are from the South African Native Labour Corps, men who were killed when the troopship SS *Mendi* sank on 21 February 1917.

ABOVE: Men of the South African Native Labour Contingent at work in France under the supervision of an NCO. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

LEFT: The Hollybrook Memorial. Private Joseph Tshite and Private the Reverend Isaac Wauchope Dyobha are amongst those commemorated on its panels. (COURTESY OF THE COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION)

It was just over a month earlier, on 16 January 1917, that the SS *Mendi* had sailed from Cape Town en route to La Havre. Alongside thirty-three crew members, *Mendi* was transporting 805 privates, seventeen NCOs and five officers of the 5th Battalion South African Native Labour Contingent.

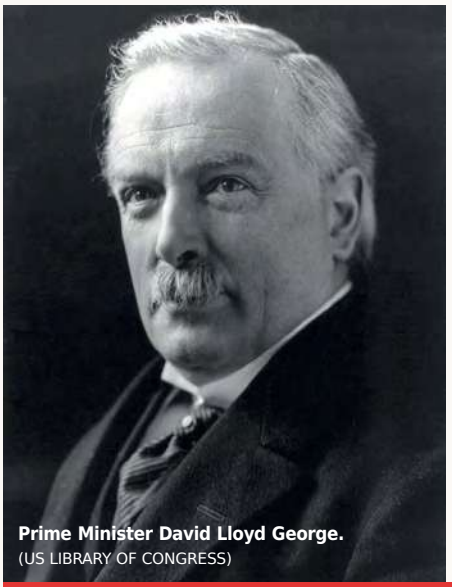
Mendi was almost in sight of shore when, on the morning of 21 February, the 4,000-ton steamship was rammed and almost cut in half by an 11,000-ton liner, the SS *Darro*, just south of the Isle of Wight. Despite the extremely foggy conditions, the SS *Darro* had been steaming at full speed and emitting no warning signals. Such was the violence of the collision that *Mendi* sank in just twenty minutes.

No steps were taken by the *SS Darro* to lower boats or rescue the survivors. She stood off while boats from the *SS Mendi*'s escorting destroyer, HMS *Brisk*, rowed among the survivors, trying to rescue them. Despite these efforts, 607 black soldiers, nine white officers and all of *Mendi*'s crew perished.

There are many stories of bravery being displayed as the troopship went down. Serving in 'C' Company, Private Joseph Tshite, a schoolmaster from near Pretoria, encouraged those around him with hymns and prayers until he slipped under the waves. Among the casualties were prominent men such as the Pondoland chiefs Henry Bokleni, Dokoda Richard Ndamase, Mxonywa Bangani, Mongameli and the Reverend Isaac Wauchope Dyobha. The latter, serving as a Private in the Medical Section, is reported as having said the following as the disaster unfolded: 'Be quiet and calm my countrymen, for what is taking place now is what you came here to do. We are all going to die, and that is what we came for. Brothers, we are drilling the death drill. I, a Zulu, say here and now that you are all my brothers ... Xhosas, Swazis, Pondos, Basotho and all others, let us die like warriors. We are the sons of Africa. Raise your war cries my brothers, for though they made us leave our assegais back in the kraals, our voices are left with our bodies.'

On receiving the news of the disaster on 9 March 1917, all the members of the South African House of Assembly, under Prime Minister Louis Botha, rose in their seats as a token of respect to their fellow South Africans who had lost their lives in the icy waters of the English Channel.

A STATE OF T



Prime Minister David Lloyd George. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

23 FEBRUARY 1917

ABOVE: Women bringing in the harvest in Britain during the First World War. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

On 23 February 1917, Lloyd George stood up in the House Commons to deliver an important speech. This was not about great battles on land, at sea or in the air, nor the valiant efforts of the soldiers, sailors and airmen. It was the far less glamourous subject of the desperate need to manage the shipping needs of the country, and the grave situation that the UK faced.

'The ultimate success of the Allied cause depends,' the Prime Minister declared, 'on our solving the tonnage difficulties with which we are confronted. Before the War our shipping tonnage was only just adequate ... Since the War began there have been enormous increases in the demands upon our tonnage. There is transport for the Navy, transport for the Army, and for our expeditions in France and in Eastern waters. Our Allies have made very considerable demands upon British tonnage. Over a million tons of our shipping have been allocated to France alone. There is a very considerable tonnage set aside for Russia and also for Italy, and the balance left for the ordinary needs of the nation, after providing for these War exigencies, is only about half the whole of our tonnage.'

Lloyd George then gave a fuller breakdown of the demands placed upon the British merchant marine: 'In the twelve months before the War about 50,000,000 of tonnage entered British ports. During the last twelve months that was reduced to 30,000,000 tons ... That is almost exclusively attributable to the fact that a very large proportion of our tonnage has been allocated to the Allies. A very considerable proportion of our tonnage goes direct to France with commodities from America and elsewhere, and a good deal of our tonnage goes to Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, and Salonika.'

Coupled with the added pressure on shipping was the loss of vessels to the German submarines. There is no doubt that the Allies were faced with a grave situation, a message the Prime Minister spelt out in stark terms: 'The Germans have concentrated upon the building of submarines in order to destroy our mercantile marine, fully realising that that is far away the most effective way, and the only effective way, of putting out of action what they consider to be the most formidable item in the Alliance ... I am not going to withhold from the House the fact that if the nation is not prepared to accept drastic measures for dealing with the submarine peril, there is disaster in front of us, and I am here with all the responsibility of a Minister of the Crown to tell the House and the nation that fact.'

Lloyd George stated that he believed that the Royal Navy would eventually be able to minimize the effectiveness of the U-Boats, but it would never be able to eradicate the submarine menace completely. The Government decided, therefore, that it had to act: 'We mean to propose measures which we think will be adequate. It means enormous sacrifices on the part of every class in the community, and the national grit is going to be tested by the answer that is going to be given to the statement I make to-day on behalf of the Government.'

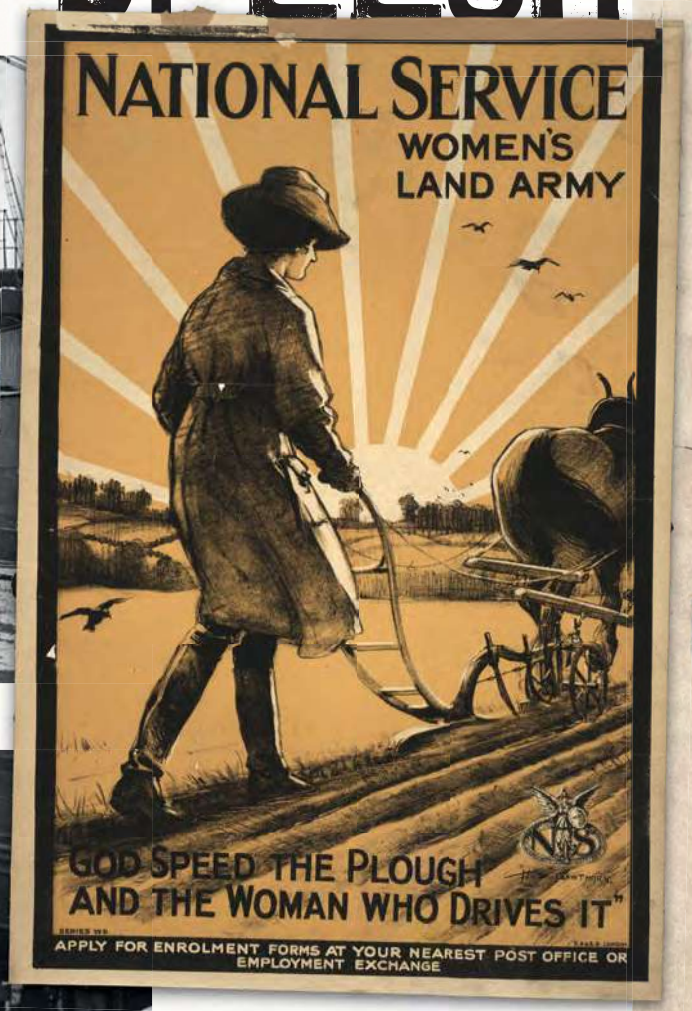
The measures were divided into three categories. The first was the concentration of effort by the Royal Navy on 'grappling the menace' of the U-Boats, the second was to increase the rate of ship building 'wherever we can get them', and the third was 'to limit our needs for overseas transport by dispensing with all non-essential commodities now being brought from over the seas and by producing as much of the essentials of life as we can at home'.

As the issue of the U-Boats was one to be addressed by the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lloyd George dealt with the other two subjects. With regard to ship building, he observed that much more could be achieved in the British yards, remarking that wherever payment by results had been introduced 'there has been an increase in the output of shipbuilding yards, sometimes of 20, sometimes 30, and sometimes even 40 per cent'. Remarkable as it may seem, even at the height of the deadliest war the world had seen to that date, it was not the desire to help the country that induced some men to work as hard as they could, it was, it seemed, simply money. Nevertheless, the Government wanted to extend such schemes and sought the support of Unions, many of which opposed payment by results. Astonishingly, Lloyd George had to make the following observation: 'If workmen and employers in all classes of the community strove to do their utmost I believe that Great Britain can bear that burden successfully right to the end.'

The third of the Government's measures was the one that Lloyd George described as the most important – self-sufficiency. Britain, with cheap goods available from the Commonwealth, had become a nation of importers. Timber and iron ore was being imported in the thousands of tons, when much more could be self-produced. In terms of food, following the abolition of the Corn Laws Britain had become a net importer of up to eighty per cent of her cereals. 'It is

THE NATION SPEECH

ABOVE: The scene on a French quayside as supplies bound for the British Expeditionary Force are unloaded. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)


NATIONAL SERVICE
WOMEN'S LAND ARMY
GOD SPEED THE PLOUGH AND THE WOMAN WHO DRIVES IT"
APPLY FOR ENROLMENT FORMS AT YOUR NEAREST POST OFFICE OR EMPLOYMENT EXCHANGE

ABOVE: A poster produced in 1917 to encourage service in the Women's Land Army with the aim of increasing production. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

LEFT AND BELOW: Female shipbuilders at work in a British shipyard during the First World War. The original caption, published on 10 June 1916, states that they are 'handling long steel bars'. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

urgently necessary that the farmers should be induced to increase the area under cultivation at once,' the Prime Minister insisted, 'otherwise the nation may have to choose between diminishing its military effort and underfeeding its population'. To induce farmers to extend the land under cultivation, the Government set price guarantees for farmers, rates that remained in place not just during the existing crisis but in some instances even into the 1920s.

Thus it was, that in order to resolve the mounting crisis that was facing the country in her hour of greatest need, the Government had to appeal not only to the patriotic spirit of the men and women of the land, but also to their financial self-interest.

FIRST NIGHT BOMBER SQUADRON FORMED

23 FEBRUARY 1917

The first RFC squadron to be introduced specifically for night bombing, No.100 Squadron, was officially formed at Hingham, Norfolk, on 23 February 1917. It moved to France a month later, being posted to the airfield at Izel-le-Hameau, and upon arrival was equipped with modified Royal Aircraft Factory FE.2b two-seat pusher biplanes.

Writing after the war, Major C. Gordon Burge OBE noted that, 'It can be truthfully stated here that there was no machine that served its country so well as did this type ... It was undoubtedly a most excellent machine for night bombing, and the whole personnel of the Squadron made the best of the machine and did it more than credit.'

The squadron's first operation was made during the night of 5-6 April 1917, the target being the enemy airfield at Douai – which just happened to be the base of the unit commanded by Manfred von Richthofen, the Red Baron. Von Richthofen himself later recalled this first raid by No.100 Squadron: 'The telephone bell rang, and we were informed the British were on the way ... then certainly we did hear the sound of engines, at first quite soft but nevertheless quite unmistakable. The anti-aircraft guns and searchlights seemed also to have had the message, they also gradually got busy ...

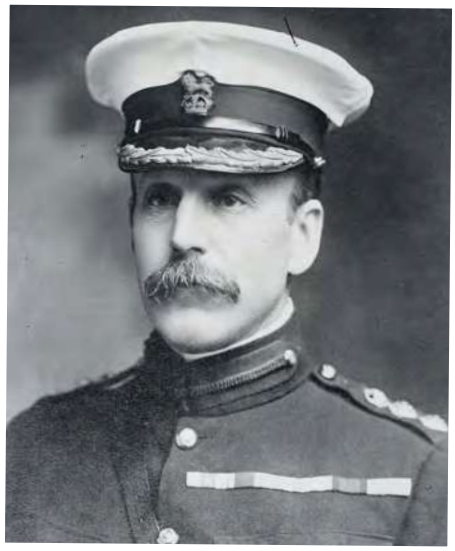
'The Englishman was flying very high. First he circled round the aerodrome and we began to think that he was looking for some other objective. All at once, however, he shut off his engine, and came down. 'Now for the real things,' said Wolff. We fetched our rifles and began to fire at the Englishman. We could not see him yet, but the noise he made alone calmed our nerves. At last he was caught in the beam, and the whole aerodrome shouted with surprise ...

'He was not more than a kilometre away, and was flying straight for our aerodrome, and coming still lower. Then he shut off his engine again, and came straight for us ... It wasn't long before the first dropped, and then there came a rain of small bombs. It was a fine display of fireworks, and might have impressed a rabbit. I believe that night bombing has a merely moral effect ... So this old lattice-tail dropped his bombs, and that from a height of 50 metres. It was a regular bit of impertinence.'

The squadron records indicate that a total of eleven bombers took part, dropping a total of 128 20lb and four 40lb bombs. The results were recorded thus: 'All bombs were dropped on and around hangars. Some very good shooting done. 4 sheds seen burning when last machine left.' One of the raiders failed to return, this being the FE.2b flown by Second Lieutenant Richards and Air Mechanic 2nd Class Barnes (the observer).

ABOVE LEFT: One of those who was on the receiving end of No.100 Squadron's first raid – the Red Baron, Manfred Albrecht Freiherr von Richthofen. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

BELOW: A flying replica of the Royal Aircraft Factory FE.2b, with which No.100 Squadron became operational. (COURTESY OF PHILIP CAPPER)



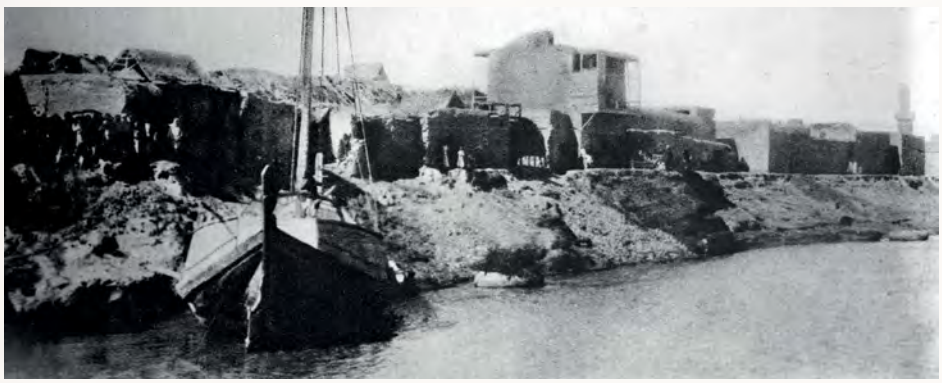
KUT EL AMARA RECAPTURED

ABOVE LEFT: Maude's offensive rolled on after the recapture of Kut. Other successes soon followed, including the fall of Baghdad on 11 March 1917. Here British troops are seen in Baghdad that day. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

ABOVE: General Sir Frederick Stanley Maude. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

BELOW LEFT: A view of Kut El Amara taken from the River Tigris. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

24 FEBRUARY 1917



Situated on a bend of the River Tigris in Mesopotamia, the town of Kut El Amara, held by Major General Sir Charles Townshend's forces, had been besieged by Turkish troops in early 1916. It finally capitulated on 29 April that year. Whilst the surrender of Kut led to the creation of a parliamentary committee of enquiry into operations in Mesopotamia, far more horrific repercussions awaited those who were taken prisoner. Of the 11,800 men who left the town with their captors on 6 May 1916, 4,250 died either on their way to captivity or in the camps that awaited them at the journey's end.

It was not until reinforced British divisions became available, as well as the arrival of a new leader in the form of General Frederick Stanley Maude, that the Allies' fortunes in the region changed. Maude's moves against Kut were, however, careful and considered – partly due to the weather and partly the result of demands from London that casualties must be kept to a minimum.

'Operations proceeded in a most satisfactory manner,' noted Vice-Admiral Sir Rosslyn E. Wemyss in a subsequent despatch, 'and early in February our forces were in possession of the right bank as far as to the westward of Kut el Amara, with bridges over the Hai, large numbers of prisoners having been taken, guns captured, and heavy loss inflicted on the enemy.

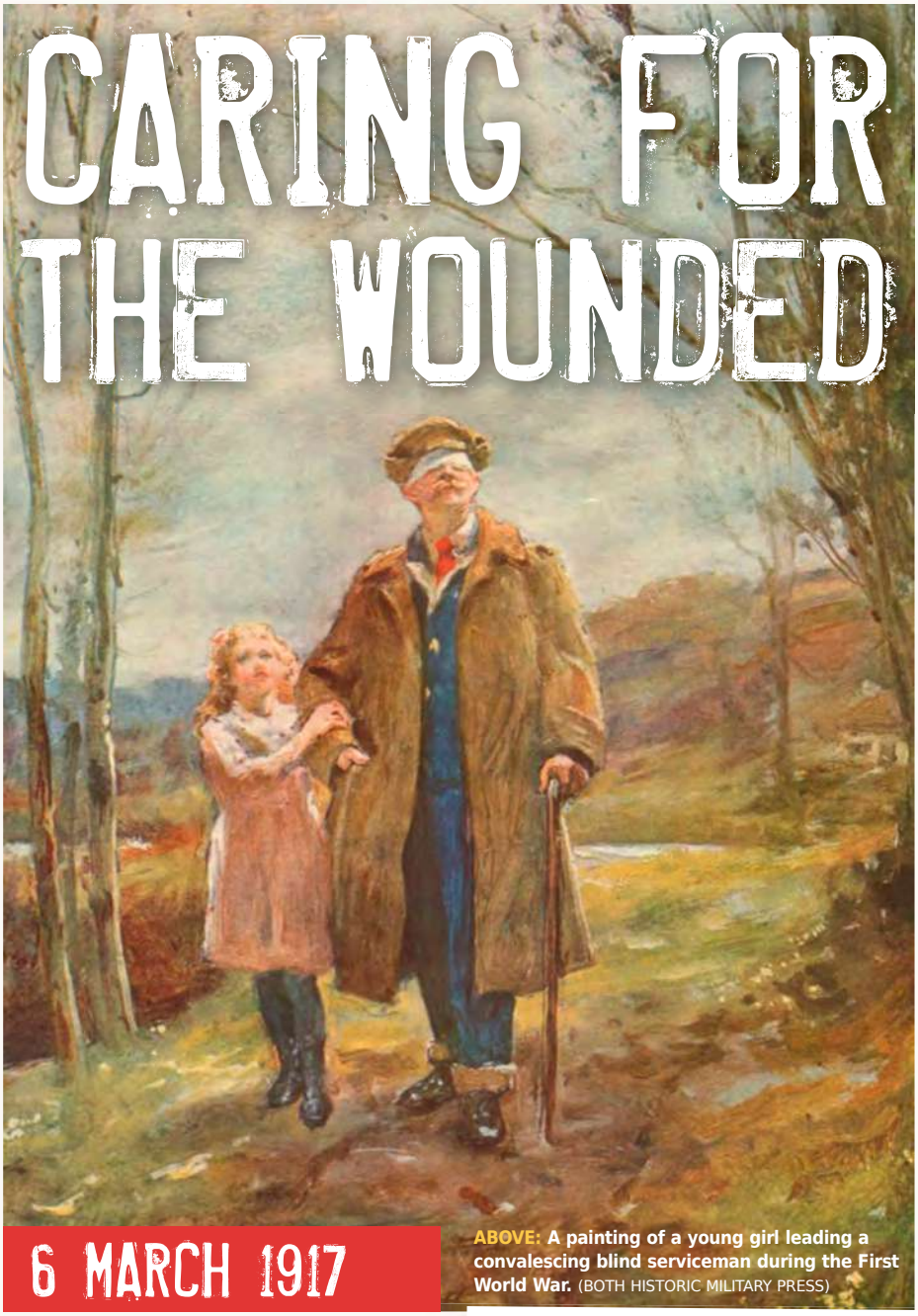
'After [an] intense bombardment ... a successful assault of the Sannaiyat position [about ten miles south of Kut] was made on 22nd February, and a footing obtained ... During the night of the 22nd-23rd dummy attempts were made to cross the river in various places above Sannaiyat, and just before daybreak of the 23rd covering parties were rowed across the Tigris near Shumran [immediately beside Kut] in pontoons, a surprise landing effected, and a bridge thrown across.

'By evening the infantry of one division had crossed, and another followed, the enemy trying ineffectually to stem the British advance on the Shumran peninsula. Meanwhile our troops were pushing forward boldly through the Sannaiyat position. The whole Turkish position was manifestly becoming untenable, and they commenced a general retreat, which developed later into a rout.'

As Wemyss had noted, the Turkish commander at Kut, Musa Kâzım Karabekir, managed to achieve what Townshend had failed to do just ten months earlier – withdraw from the town and its environs without becoming trapped. As Royal Navy gunboats pursued the fleeing enemy up the Tigris, British and Indian troops re-entered Kut on 24 February.

'The town was deserted and in ruins,' remarked Wemyss. Whilst this success represented another defeat for the Ottoman government, to the British press the humiliation over the loss of Kut in 1916 had, at last, been partially rectified.

CARING FOR THE WOUNDED



6 MARCH 1917

ABOVE: A painting of a young girl leading a convalescing blind serviceman during the First World War. (BOTH HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

RIGHT: A group of wounded soldiers, wearing their 'hospital blues', convalescing at an unknown location in the UK during the First World War.

With the Great War into its fourth year, the organisations for dealing with the many wounded were well-established. Such were the numbers, however, that numerous voluntary organisations still had a vital role to play. Some of these were highlighted by the Minister of Pensions, George Barnes, during a debate in the House of Commons on 6 March 1917. Barnes had started by declaring: 'It is only right to acknowledge the splendid zeal and disinterestedness of those agencies, and if I say a word about two or three of them I hope that it will not be thought that the omission of others is any slight upon them.'

'In the first place,' continued Barnes, 'I want to mention one which, I think, is perhaps more complete than any other – that is the splendid provision made at St. Dunstans for the men blinded in the War. As is well known, Sir Arthur Pearson lives himself in a world of darkness, but that has not quenched his extraordinary energy which he has thrown into the relief of his fellow sufferers. Some 600 men have been blinded in the War. So far, 210 of them, I think, have already passed through St. Dunstans. Three hundred are still there, and 100 others are to follow.'

In 1915, Queen Mary had expressed concern for the future of those servicemen left severely disabled by the conflict. She tasked the Red Cross with the task of finding a 'permanent haven' for them. The Auctioneers & Estate Agents Institute raised funds to purchase the old Star & Garter Hotel on Richmond Hill, Surrey, and handed the deeds to the Queen. It soon became apparent that the building was not suitable for its intended use. The solution was to demolish the hotel and replace it with a purpose-built structure – the Star & Garter Home – for which funds were raised by the British Women's Hospital Committee. Consequently, when the Home opened its doors to the first ten residents on 14 January 1916, temporary accommodation was provided in the pavilion annexe.

Despite its relative youth, the Star & Garter was singled out by Barnes in his speech: '[It] is under the direction of Sir Frederick Treves, and is intended for the benefit of paralytics. They are not many – about 64 are there now, and there may be 600 altogether in the country.'

'Then there is the hospital at Roehampton ... [which] deals with limbless men,' the Minister for Pensions continued. 'Some 6,070 men have already passed through, and 1,260 have been trained for new occupations, being unable to follow the occupations which they followed before the War. Positions have been found for those 1,260, and the remainder have been looked after in other ways.'

BELOW: British troops enter what is believed to be the Grand Place, or main square, in Péronne, on 18 March 1917. (ALL IMAGES HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS UNLESS STATED OTHERWISE)

BRITISH TROOPS ENTER PÉRONNE

18 MARCH 1917

Following the German withdrawal as part of Operation *Alberich*, British troops entered Péronne and occupied Mont St. Quentin, to the north of the town, at 07.00 hours on 18 March 1917. To the south of Péronne the advance parties of British battalions established themselves during the day along the western bank of the Somme from the town to just north of Epenancourt. By 22.00 hours on the same day, Brie Bridge had been repaired by Royal Engineers sufficiently for the passage of infantry in single file, and the troops crossed to the east bank of the river, in spite of some opposition.

Amongst the first men to enter Péronne was Geoffrey Malins, who had famously filmed the preparations for, and the early fighting of, the Battle of the Somme. Disappointed that he had not been there to film the entry of the troops, he set off as rapidly as he could, travelling along the by-roads as he believed that the main roads would be blocked with military vehicles. He abandoned his car just outside the village of Biaches, strapped his camera on his back, and started to walk through the village towards Péronne. The signs of the German retreat soon began to reveal themselves.

'The ground was absolutely littered with the horrible wastage of war,' he later wrote. 'Roads were torn open, leaving great yawning gaps that looked for all the world like huge jagged wounds. On my right lay the Château of La Maisonnette. The ground there was a shambles, for numerous bodies in various stages of putrefaction lay about as they had fallen.'

Malins continued into Biaches itself and the sight that met his eyes he refused to describe. He wrote that he was incapable of giving even the slightest impression of what he saw: 'It was as if a human skeleton had been torn asunder, bone by bone, and then flung in all directions. Then, look around and say – this was once a man. You could say the same thing of Biaches – this was once a village.' Malins ▸▸

ABOVE: The actual wooden panel that the Germans had hung on the front of Péronne's town hall. The legend 'Nicht ärgern, nur wundern' is literally translated as 'Don't be angry, just wonder'. For the British soldiers who first entered the town, it was thought that the sign read 'Don't be angry, just admire'. (COURTESY OF THE HISTORIAL DE LA GRANDE GUERRE; WWW.HISTORIAL.ORG)

ABOVE: During one of his many tours of the Western Front, King George V visited Péronne on 13 July 1917. As can be seen in this picture, he was accompanied by Edward, Prince of Wales, and General Julian Byng. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

stayed for some time there filming, but as the light was fading quickly, he hurried on to Péronne.

The town of Péronne had been in German hands since August 1914 and had been an important logistical centre. The enemy had left it in ruins. 'The old gateway and drawbridge across the moat were destroyed; the huge blocks of masonry that were tossed about were playthings in the hands of the mighty force of high explosives which flung them there. These scenes I carefully filmed, together with several others in the vicinity of the ramparts.

'The town was the same as every other I had filmed – burnt and shell-riven. The place as a habitable town quite simply did not exist. German names were everywhere; the names of the streets were altered, even a French washerwoman had put up a notice that said "washing was done here" in German.

'Street after street I passed through and filmed. Many of the buildings were still burning, and at one corner of the Grand Place flames were shooting out of the windows of the three remaining houses in Péronne. I hastily fitted up my camera and filmed the scene. When I had finished it was necessary to run the gauntlet and pass directly under the burning buildings to get into the square.

'Showers of sparks were flying about, pieces of the burning building were being blown in all directions by the strong wind. But I had to get by, so, buttoning up my collar tightly, fastening my steel shrapnel helmet on my head, and tucking the camera under my arm, I made a rush, yelling out to my man to follow with the tripod. As I passed I felt several heavy pieces of something hit my helmet and another blazing piece hit my shoulder and stuck there, making me set up an unearthly yell as the flames caught my ear and singed my hair. But, quickly shooting past, I reached a place of safety, and setting up the camera I obtained some excellent views of the burning buildings.

'Standing upon a heap of rubble, which once formed a branch of one of the largest banking concerns in France, I took a panoramic scene of the great square. The smoke clouds curling in and around the skeleton walls appeared for all the world like some loathsome reptile seeming to gloat upon its prey, loath to leave it, until it had made absolutely certain that not a single thing was left to be devoured.

'With the exception of the crackling flames and the distant boom of the guns, it was like a city of the dead. The once beautiful church was totally destroyed. In the square was the base of a monument upon which, before the war, stood a memorial to France's glorious dead in the war of 1870. The "kultured" Germans had destroyed the figure and, in its place, had stuck up a dummy stuffed with straw in the uniform of a French Zouave. Could ever a greater insult be shown to France!'

Malins left the town to follow the line of the German retreat towards St Quentin. Amongst the ruins of Pont les Brie, he watched British troops cross the Somme and squadrons of the Duke of Lancaster's cavalry hurrying forward to harass the enemy. Cyclist patrols were also making their way over. 'In the distance I watched our cavalry deploying in extended order and advance towards a wood to clear it of the enemy rearguards. Motor-cyclists, with their machine-guns, were dashing up the hill anxious to get into contact with the flying enemy.'

The Somme, though, was being left behind. When he had first seen the river Malins had described it as looking like a glistening silver snake, winding its way north and south through the French countryside. 'There,' he wrote, 'was the river Somme – the name which will go down to history as the most momentous in this the bloodiest war the world has ever known'. ●

ABOVE, LEFT AND RIGHT: King George V is seen here, with members of his entourage, during his visit to Péronne looking down from the bridge which carried the Rue Saint-Fursy over one of the many waterways at the southern part of the town. The mill that can just be seen on the left of the view still stands today.

LEFT: The damaged *Mairie*, or town hall, at the northern end of the Grande Place in Péronne. Built in the sixteenth century, this imposing structure was rebuilt after the Armistice.

AUSTRALIA'S ONLY WW1 AERIAL VC

Francis Hubert McNamara was an Australian schoolteacher and a reserve officer before the Great War. Called to the colours and promoted to Lieutenant, in August 1915 he volunteered for flying training. In January 1916 he was posted to No.1 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps and duly sailed for Egypt.

Whilst with 1 Squadron, McNamara flew both Martinsyde G.100/102s and the Royal Aircraft Factory B.E.2cs from 'Kilo 143', the squadron's base in north-eastern Egypt. On 20 March 1917, the squadron was ordered to attack an enemy railway line near Wadi Hesse in Palestine. Two Martinsydes (flown by Lieutenants A.W. Ellis and McNamara) and two B.E.2cs (piloted by Captain David W. Rutherford and Lieutenant Peter Drummond) were detailed to carry out the raid.

During his pass over the target McNamara was seriously wounded in the buttocks and his Martinsyde badly damaged. As he turned for home, McNamara saw a distress flare fired by the pilot of one of the B.E.2cs, which had been forced down by enemy ground fire.

Despite his wounds and the problems with his own 'plane, McNamara landed, halting 200 yards from the stricken B.E.2c. With 'bodies of enemy troops hurrying to the scene from all directions', it appeared to the others that McNamara 'must be killed or captured'.

20 MARCH 1917

McNamara yelled at Rutherford to get onto the engine cowling of his aircraft. As soon as this was accomplished, he turned his machine into wind.

Weakened by loss of blood, McNamara found it impossible to keep his 'plane straight on its take-off. Suddenly, the aircraft veered off, the undercarriage broke away and the nose drove into the ground. Anxious to prevent the Martinsyde falling into enemy hands, McNamara used a shot from his revolver to hole its fuel tank, and a shot from his Very pistol to set it alight. The two Australians then made their way back to the B.E.2c. The approaching Turkish cavalry had by this time dismounted.

A quick look at the B.E.2c showed a tyre had been ripped off its wheel, the wing centre-section wires broken, a fuselage longeron was cracked, and an ammunition drum for the Lewis machine-gun was blocking the rudder-bar. The rudder problem was quickly solved, and realising his comrade was the only one of the pair capable of doing so, McNamara got Rutherford to swing the prop. Thankfully, the engine caught. Rutherford quickly scrambled into the observer's seat, and McNamara opened up the engine. Three times the 'plane stuck in the mud: three times McNamara gunned it out. By the time he eased it off the ground, the Turks were practically on its tail.

Kilo 143 was some seventy miles away and at times McNamara's speed fell to just thirty-five mph! Though weakened by loss of blood, he somehow made a successful landing. For his actions McNamara became the only Australian airman to be awarded the Victoria Cross during the First World War.

ABOVE: A portrait of Lieutenant F.H. McNamara in front of his tent at the Central Flying School, Point Cook, Victoria, in 1916. (COURTESY OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL; DAAV00041A)

BELOW: The incident for which Lieutenant F.H. 'Frank' McNamara was awarded the Victoria Cross – a painting by the artist H. Septimus Power. (COURTESY OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL; ART08007)

FIRST IMPERIAL WAR CONFERENCE

21 MARCH 1917

Ever since 1887, there had been periodic meetings between government leaders from the self-governing colonies and dominions of the British Empire. These were originally termed 'Colonial Conferences' and after 1907, 'Imperial Conferences'. Before the outbreak of war in 1914 the last Imperial Conference had been in 1911. The need for a combined approach to the conflict across the Empire led to the decision not only to reinstate the Imperial Conferences, but to hold an Imperial War Conference at the same time whilst all the Imperial leaders were together.

As a result, on 21 March 1917, the first Imperial Conference of the war, and the concurrent first ever Imperial War Conference, was held in London. The leaders of Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, Newfoundland and India met to discuss the war effort. This included, for the first time, a non-White representative in the form of General Maharaja Sir Ganga Singh.

This first War Conference continued until 27 April 1917. Amongst the subjects that were discussed was the establishment of an Imperial Mineral Resources Bureau to track down all the available sources of key minerals to ensure their most efficient extraction and distribution. A similar move was adopted for the 'Development and Control of Natural Resources', to allow for the control of all essential natural resources throughout the Empire, particularly food. The ever-increasing need for munitions of all kinds was also considered, with the view to the establishment of munitions factories in areas of the Empire where no such facilities existed.

Amongst its most enduring resolutions was that in the future the Imperial constitutional arrangements would be rearranged 'based upon a full recognition of the Dominions as autonomous nations of an Imperial Commonwealth'. Despite the eventual dissolution of the Empire, this meeting of heads of state continues to the present day, in the form of the Meetings of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers.

One consideration which continues to have relevance in the modern world was with regards to the 'dumping' of manufactured items by former enemy nations after the war as those countries transitioned to peace-time economies. It was agreed that any attempt at unfair competition by those countries would result in import controls across the Empire for twelve months after the cessation of hostilities. The belief was that already Germany was preparing its economy for peace-time conditions.

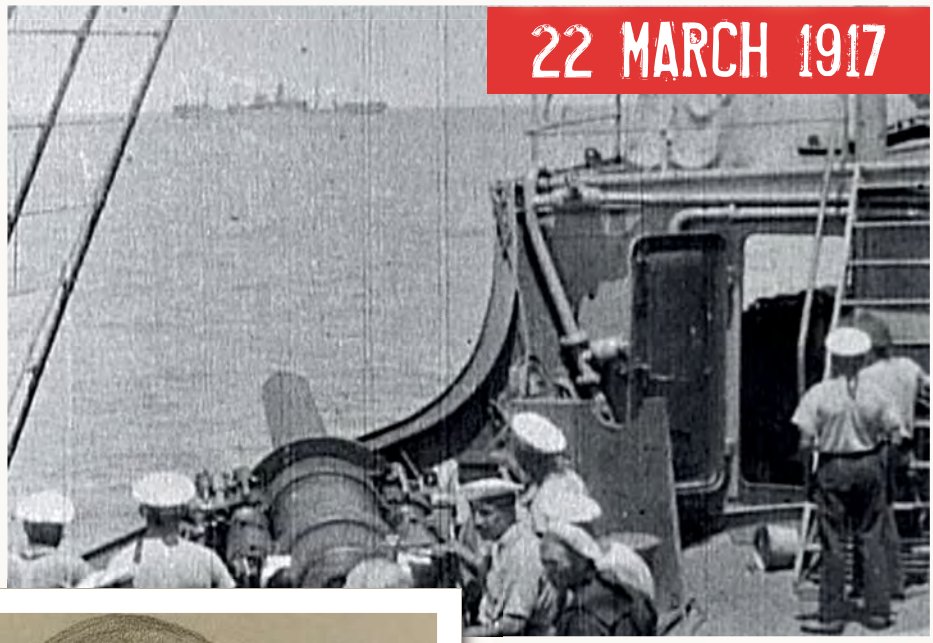
On the fifteenth day of the meeting, the subject of 'temptation' was raised. The extract from the minutes of the meeting recorded that efforts should be made to 'protect our men by having the streets, the neighbourhood of camps, and other places of public resort, kept clear, so far as practicable, of women of the prostitute class'. The war, the Secretary of State for the Colonies made clear, 'entailed great sacrifices'!

TOP: A photograph taken at No.10 Downing Street during the first ever Imperial War Conference. David Lloyd George can be seen seated in the centre of the front row, whilst General Maharaja Sir Ganga Singh is in the centre row, second from the left. (BOTH US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

ABOVE: General Sir Ganga Singh (1880-1943), the Maharaja of the state of Bikaner, India.

SMS MÖWE RETURNS TO PORT

22 MARCH 1917



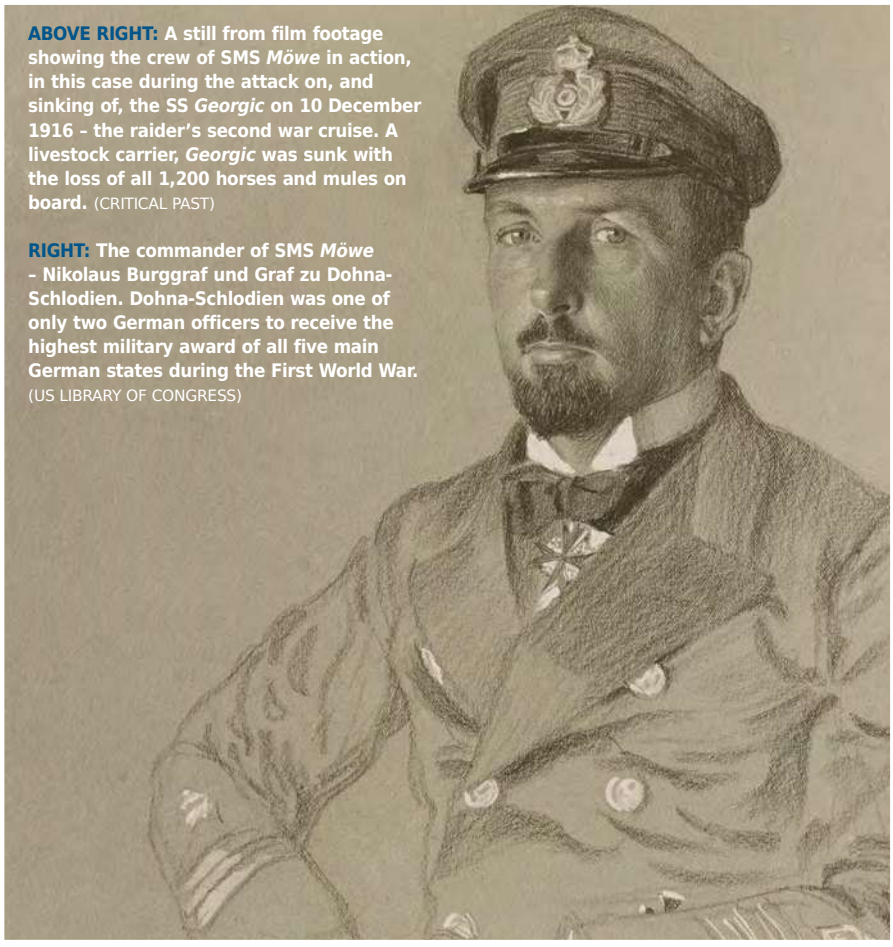
On 22 March 1917, the Imperial German Navy's auxiliary cruiser SMS *Möwe* docked in Kiel having completed a highly successful second, but last, war cruise.

Möwe had left Wilhelmshaven on 29 December 1915 on its first patrol. By the time she returned to Germany on 4 April the following year, her skipper, Nikolaus zu Dohna-Schlodien, could claim to have captured or sunk fifteen ships. It was not until 23 November 1916, that *Möwe* began its second war cruise. Such was the scale of Dohna-Schlodien's successes – his ship was the most successful German surface raider of the First World War – that his return to port in 1917 made global news – even being reported in the British press. The day after *Möwe* reached Kiel, for example, the *Aberdeen Journal* published a story entitled 'The Moewe's Exploits':

'The identity of the German raider which was recently at large in the Atlantic has now been definitely established. She has returned to a German port, and the German Admiralty describes her as the Moewe. In the course of her cruise, the vessel has met with considerable success. In January last, it may be remembered, it was reported that she had sunk eight British and two French ships and captured two others, one of them the *Yarrowdale*, which safely reached a German port with 469 prisoners. To this list have now been added nine British steamers and two sailing vessels of whose crews 593 men have been landed by the Moewe at Swinemunde. Many of the victims were of large size, and it is declared that the aggregate tonnage accounted for since the raider was first sighted in the Atlantic on December 4 is 123,100.

'In her first raiding exercise more than a year ago, the Moewe sunk 15 vessels, 13 of them British, the total tonnage being 57,835. Altogether, therefore, up to date the Moewe has sent to the bottom 180,935 tons of shipping. For the hulls alone, irrespective of the cargoes, this represents at present rates a loss of several millions sterling. This suffices to show how much reason we have to be thankful that the Moewe, owing to the ceaseless vigilance of our Navy, is the only one of these piratical craft which has been able to prey upon shipping since the disappearance of the German cruisers which happened to be at large when the war broke out.'

Following her return *Möwe* was taken out of service as a raider, it being felt that the vessel was too valuable as a propaganda tool to be risked again. Handed to the UK as reparations after the Armistice, and having been renamed *Greenbrier*, she was operated by the Elders and Fyffes line before being sold on to a German company. On 7 April 1945, the former raider was attacked and sunk by Beaufighters of RAF Coastal Command whilst steaming off the Norwegian coast.



ABOVE RIGHT: A still from film footage showing the crew of SMS *Möwe* in action, in this case during the attack on, and sinking of, the SS *Georgic* on 10 December 1916 - the raider's second war cruise. A livestock carrier, *Georgic* was sunk with the loss of all 1,200 horses and mules on board. (CRITICAL PAST)

RIGHT: The commander of SMS *Möwe* - Nikolaus Burggraf und Graf zu Dohna-Schlodien. Dohna-Schlodien was one of only two German officers to receive the highest military award of all five main German states during the First World War. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

BELOW: Three members of the Australian 2nd Division standing outside the Town Hall in Bapaume, on 19 March 1917. They are blissfully unaware that a delayed-action mine is hidden in the tower. (COURTESY OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL; E00393)

BAPAUME BOOBY TRAP 25 MARCH 1917

Although the Allies had used booby traps during the withdrawal from Gallipoli, on the Western Front their use on a large scale was first encountered when the Germans fell back on to the Hindenburg Line under Operation *Alberich*. In a methodical and well-organised operation, the area the enemy abandoned was not only to be turned into a wasteland but sown with hundreds of booby traps. These included hidden explosive charges with delays, traps left in dugouts and trenches, and charges attached to attractive items such as souvenirs.

In fact, so many booby traps where sown that even the German rear guard became wary as the hour to withdraw grew near. *Leutenant* Ernst Jünger, a tough battle-hardened German subaltern, later recalled that 'during the last hours I had dared not touch any box, bucket or door in case I might go up in the air'.

When the Germans did fall back the advancing British came across the devices they left behind. 'Booby traps abounded', wrote Lieutenant T.A.M. Nash, who served with the 16th Battalion Manchester Regiment, 'and a large part of our casualties were caused by these slaughter traps'.

One particularly deadly ploy was first encountered at the Town Hall in Bapaume following the town's liberation by Australian troops on 17 March 1917. Prior to their withdrawal the Germans had left charges in the cellar and first floor of the building. The advancing Allies proceeded with a check of the building and, finding the mines in the cellar and first floor (which they defused), they declared the Town Hall safe. However, the Germans, intending the new arrivals to find these obvious devices, had skilfully hidden another in the clock tower.

Eight days after Bapaume had been liberated, this hidden mine exploded at about midnight on the night of 25/26 March. It almost certainly involved the use of the 'German Automatic Detonating Device'. This comprised of a switch which utilised a spring-loaded striker held under tension by a wire. This wire ran through a small copper vessel at the top of the switch which was filled with acid. The acid slowly ate slowly through the wire until it sheared, allowing the striker to fire a percussion cap and detonator.

Of those inside the building at the time, only six were rescued alive. Two French deputies and a number of men employed at an Australian Comforts Fund coffee stall were killed in the explosion – the dead numbered twenty-five in total. Fatigue parties dug through the night and the next day. They rescued the six men trapped in the rubble and a group of officers and men from the 13th Field Company and the 1st Anzac Mounted Regiment who were trapped in different cellars.

ABOVE: The smoke and dust slowly settles after the explosion. (COURTESY OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL; E00376)

ABOVE: This view of the wrecked Town Hall at Bapaume was taken early on the morning of 26 March 1917. (COURTESY OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL; E00419)

MAGAZINE SPECIALS

ESSENTIAL READING FROM KEY PUBLISHING

FIRST WORLD WAR

The key events that shaped the war are brought sharply into focus.

£1.99 inc **FREE** P&P*

D-DAY

The plans, preparations, aims and objectives, airborne assault, beaches and more!

£1.99 inc **FREE** P&P*

HASTINGS

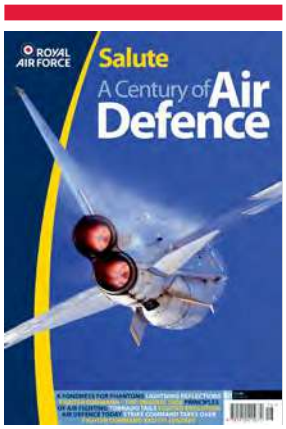
The invasion that changed history. Norman conquest 950th anniversary special.

£5.99 inc **FREE** P&P*

ARNHEM

A day-by-day account of Operation Market Garden year of the Great War.

£1.99 inc **FREE** P&P*



RAF SALUTE A CENTURY OF AIR DEFENCE

Marks the 80th anniversary of the formation of RAF Fighter Command

£5.99 inc **FREE** P&P*

1914

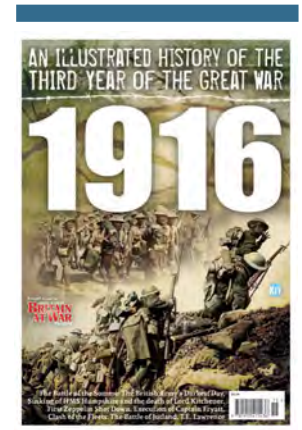
Europe had stumbled into the most deadly & destructive conflict in its history. No-one knew how it would be fought; no-one knew how it would end.

£1.99 inc **FREE** P&P*

1915

The second of our illustrated histories of the First World War examines the all-encompassing nature of second year of the conflict.

£5.99 inc **FREE** P&P*



1916

An Illustrated History brings the third year of the Great War to life in a series of fascinating features and articles.

£5.99 inc **FREE** P&P*

MAGAZINE SPECIALS

ESSENTIAL reading from the teams behind your **FAVOURITE** magazines

HOW TO **ORDER**

VISIT www.keypublishing.com/shop

OR

PHONE
UK: 01780 480404
ROW: (+44)1780 480404

*Prices correct at time of going to press. Free 2nd class P&P on all UK & BFPO orders. Overseas charges apply. Postage charges vary depending on total order value.

FREE Aviation Specials App

Simply download to purchase digital versions of your favourite aviation specials in one handy place! Once you have the app, you will be able to download new, out of print or archive specials for less than the cover price!

IN APP ISSUES £3.99

967/16

THE FIRST BATTLE OF GAZA

25 MARCH 1917

The war in the Middle East had been consistently viewed as very much a secondary threatre and the commander of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, General Sir Archibald Murray, had seen his strength diminished by drafts of his better troops to the Western Front. However, on 26 February 1917, at the Anglo-French Congress at Calais, the Supreme War Council decided that Murray should resume the offensive. Murray responded by seizing Baghdad, then in Mesopotamia, with the ultimate prize being the capture of Jerusalem.

The next major step towards Jerusalem was the occupation of the enemy stronghold of Gaza which had become an important depot for cereals with rich areas of cultivation in the surrounding areas. It would be the ideal base from which to launch an attack on the Holy City.

The attack upon Gaza was handed to Lieutenant General Charles Macpherson Dobell, who commanded the Eastern Force. This force was split into two with a main, predominantly infantry, column and a largely mounted Desert Column. The Ottoman forces in the region were under the command of the German general Friedrich Kress von Kressenstein, and numbered no more than 18,000, whilst Dobell commanded 12,000 infantry and 11,000 mounted troops, supported by between multiple field guns and sixteen howitzers.

Throughout the last days of February, the Turks were gradually pushed back towards Gaza, until, by 25 March, Dobell was ready to launch his final assault upon the town. The following morning the British advanced on Gaza under the cover of a dense fog. They were able to successfully cut off the east and southeast of Gaza and deploy troops to prevent the Turks from sending reinforcements or supplies to the town.

The British troops, with the 53rd Infantry Division at the centre of the advance, and the mounted regiments of Sir Philip Chetwode's Desert Column, made considerable gains, but the defenders held on. The struggle continued throughout the day and by dusk Chetwode's horsemen had reached the northern and western outskirts of the town. The infantry, though, was held up with the Turks ensconced in rifle pits and sheltering behind large cacti and buildings. Nevertheless, by 18.00 hours the outskirts of Gaza were in British hands with the defenders retreating into the centre of the town.

Victory was in sight, but with darkness creeping rapidly across the battlefield, Dobell and Chetwode made the fatal decision to call off the attack – just as the Turks were on the verge of surrendering.

Though the British infantry resumed their attack the next morning, the overnight delay had given Kressenstein time to reinforce the garrison at Gaza with 4,000 fresh troops. After facing a Turkish counterattack, Dobell was forced to call off the attack. His forces suffered 4,000 casualties during the First Battle of Gaza, compared with only 2,400 Turks.

ABOVE: British prisoners guarded by Ottoman troops after the First Battle of Gaza.

BELOW: Trenches of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in the sand dunes on the Gaza front.
(BOTH US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

US DECLARES WAR

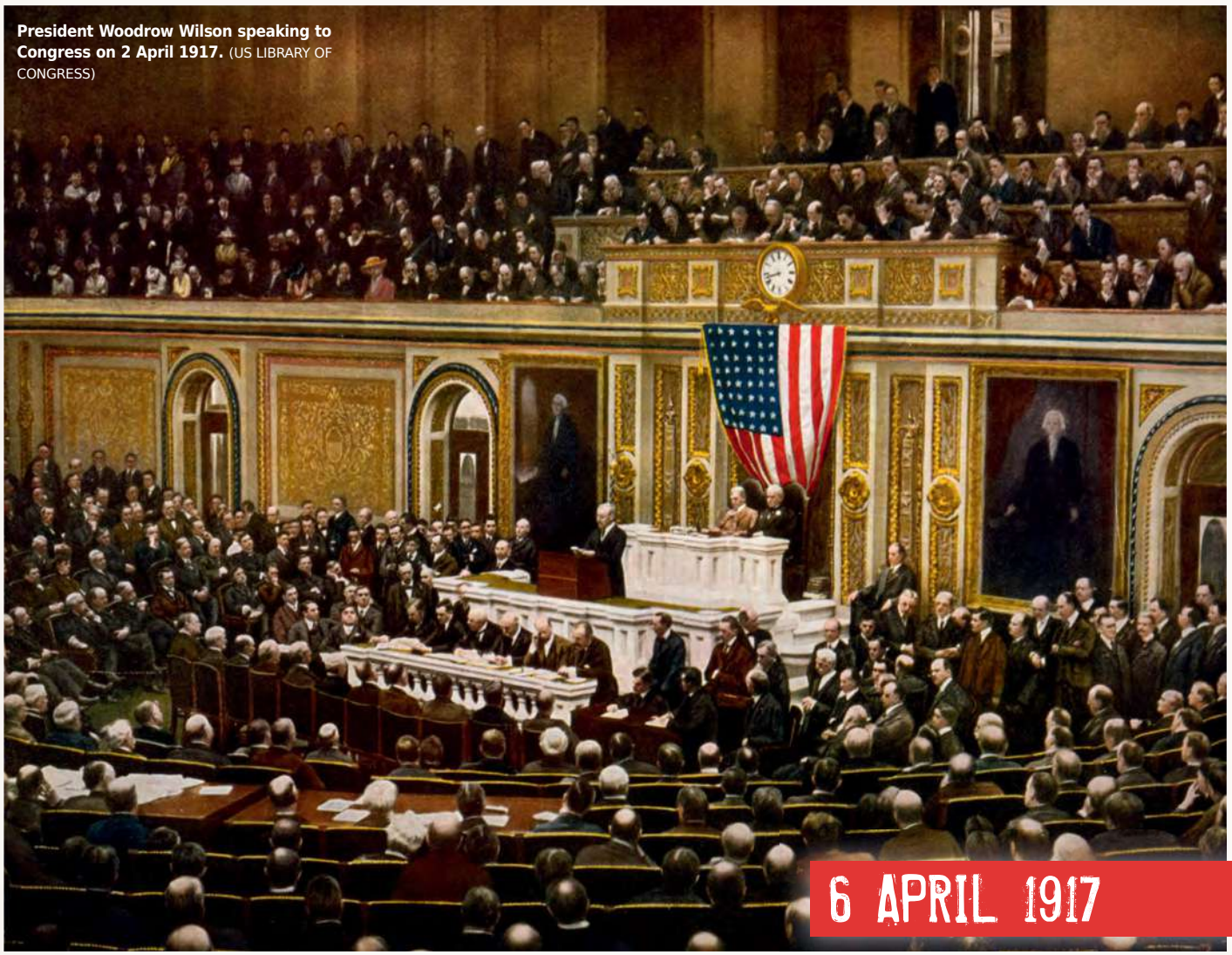
On 2 April 1917, President Wilson delivered a speech to the joint houses of Congress, in which he stated that the US had some 'very serious' decisions to make. These decisions related to the conduct of Imperial Germany, following its announcement of unrestricted submarine warfare on any vessel approaching the ports of the Allied nations. According to Wilson, this meant that Germany had 'put aside all restraints of law or of humanity'. Wilson then spelt out the effects of the German decision: 'Vessels of every kind, whatever their flag, their character, their cargo, their destination, their errand, have been ruthlessly sent to the bottom without warning and without thought of help or mercy for those on board, the vessels of friendly neutrals along with those of belligerents.'

As he warmed to his task, Wilson used language that was certain to raise emotions amongst the senators and congressmen: 'It is a war against all nations. American ships have been sunk, American lives taken, in ways which it has stirred us very deeply to learn of, but the ships and people of other neutral and friendly nations have been sunk and overwhelmed in the waters in the same way.'

Wilson then explained how America should respond: 'With a profound sense of the solemn and even tragical character of the step I am taking and of the grave responsibilities which it involves, but in unhesitating obedience to what I deem my constitutional duty, I advise that the Congress declare the recent course of the Imperial German Government to be in fact nothing less than war against the government and people of the United States; that it formally accept the status of belligerent which has thus been thrust upon it; and that it take immediate steps not only to put the country in a more thorough state of defence but also to exert all its power and employ all its resources to bring the Government of the German Empire to terms and end the war.'

If any of those present should wonder exactly what Wilson meant by becoming a belligerent, he made his position quite clear: 'It is a distressing and oppressive duty, Gentlemen of the Congress, which I have performed in thus addressing you. There are, it may be, many months of fiery trial and sacrifice ahead of us. It is a fearful thing to lead this great peaceful people into war.'

Less than a week later, on 6 April, the following statement was released: 'Whereas the Imperial German Government has committed repeated acts of war against the Government and the people of the United States of America; therefore be it Resolved by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress Assembled, that the state of war between the United States and the Imperial German Government ... is hereby formally declared.'



President Woodrow Wilson speaking to Congress on 2 April 1917. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

6 APRIL 1917

THE BATTLE OF ARRAS

9 APRIL 1917

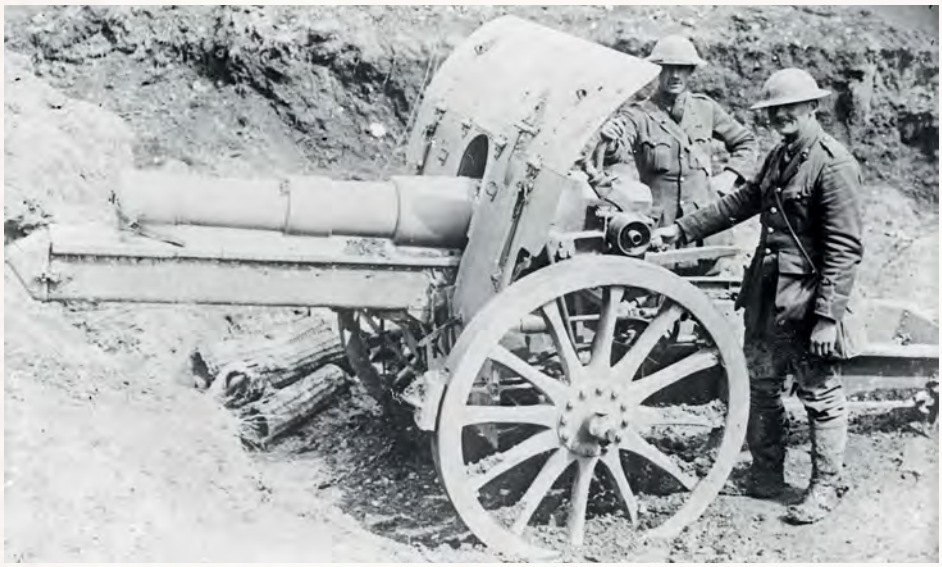
Forty-eight hours. That is how long the Allied commanders believed it would take to end the war. This would be achieved by a massive two-pronged assault upon the German positions. The First, Third and Fifth British and Commonwealth armies would move first by attacking along a broad front between Vimy in the north-west and Bullecourt in the south-east. This would draw German reserves to that sector, paving the way for the main thrust which would be delivered by the French against the Chemin des Dames ridge. The entire operation was to be known as the Nivelle Offensive and would involve around 1,200,000 men.

Unlike the Battle of the Somme, the British attack was to be concentrated on a comparatively narrow front and preceded by an intense artillery barrage. This preliminary bombardment began against the strong defences on Vimy Ridge on 20 March 1917, with the rest of the sector to be attacked on 4 April. In total more than 2,600,000 shells (over a million more than during the preliminary bombardment at the Somme) were fired against a front of just twenty-four miles. The Battle of Arras, or, more specifically, the First Battle of the Scarpe, was scheduled to begin on the morning of 9 April 1917.

The British attack saw two fundamental changes in tactics. Previously it had been believed that it was essential for the troops to maintain formation as they crossed No Man's Land, in order to arrive at the German positions as a solid body. This, it was believed, would ensure the attackers struck the enemy with the greatest impact. Whilst this had been the principle behind infantry tactics since the days of the Greek Phalanx, in the era of the

ABOVE: Light railways proved to be a useful method of transporting casualties during the Battle of Arras. After the journey up the line loaded with supplies and ammunition, the wagons did not return empty, but were used to carry the wounded, including stretcher cases. Taken on 9 April 1917, this image shows casualties about to be transported from an aid post just outside the village of Feuchy, north of the Arras-Lille road, to a Casualty Clearing Station behind the front. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

BELOW: Soldiers of the 13th Battalion, King's (Liverpool) Regiment with captured machine-guns and other equipment (note the enemy helmets worn by some) in front of a German mobile pillbox and observation post, Tilloy-les-Mofflaines, France, during the Battle of Arras on 10 April 1917. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)



LEFT: Royal Artillery officers of the 9th Division examining a German 5.9-inch howitzer captured in the west bank of Happy Valley, during the Battle of Arras in 1917. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

rifle and machine-gun all it meant was that it provided the enemy with a perfect target.

The new approach was for attack by platoons divided into a headquarters and four specialist sections – one with two trained hand grenade throwers and assistants, the second with a Lewis gunner and nine assistants, the third had a skilled sniper, scout and nine riflemen, whilst the fourth section comprised nine men with four rifle-grenade launchers.

The method of attack was for the platoon to advance in a diamond formation in relatively open order (approximately 100 yards across by fifty yards deep). The rifle section led at the forward point of the diamond with the rifle grenade and the hand grenade sections on the flanks. The Lewis gun section was at the rear of the diamond.

LEFT: A British soldier tending a soldier's grave near Blangy, 3 May 1917, during the Battle of Arras. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

The platoon would advance in this manner until the rifle section encountered resistance. The Lewis gun would then open up on the enemy whilst the grenade sections moved round the flanks of the German position.

Before these changes the mainly rifle-armed infantry had usually been unable to penetrate beyond the range of the supporting artillery. Many had been the instances of small bodies of troops breaking through the German lines only for them to be compelled to halt. With the added fire power each platoon possessed, they would be capable of holding their own even if they pushed deep into the enemy lines.

Equally, the losses the Germans had sustained in their determination to hold onto their ground regardless of its tactical importance, had also undergone a re-think. Gone were the long lines of forward trenches, being replaced by individual, though linked, advance strongpoints, with the bulk of the defending forces held in the rear. This meant that the defenders could be kept back from the Allied artillery barrages, and could be concentrated in the best defensive positions of deployed in mass to counter enemy thrusts.

The opening salvos of the Battle of Arras were described by Colonel David Rorie DSO, TD, a senior medical officer with the 51st (Highland) Division. 'Day was just breaking,' wrote Rorie, 'and the dawn was illuminated with the long line of bursting shells, to which the golden rain and coloured SOS rockets of the enemy lent a strangely picturesque variety of colour. The noise was terrific with the continuous whistling scream – like a furious gale of wind – of the thousands of heavy missiles going over us to the enemy's lines, and the thunderous drumming of their arrival.'

As well as the massive weight of metal thrown by the British artillery, a much-improved 'creeping' barrage was deployed. Earlier attempts at this at Neuve Chapelle and the Somme had not been entirely successful. Now, with more careful synchronization with the infantry and accurate calculations of barrel wear on the guns, the barrage was considerably more accurate.

The combination of new infantry and artillery tactics proved highly effective. Despite the unseasonal sleet, snow and severe cold, the Canadian Corps, as we shall see,

BELOW: The ruins of the Hotel de Ville in Arras, as pictured on 26 May 1917. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

captured the greater part of Vimy Ridge and British gains were equally impressive – by Western Front standards – with an advance of over three and a half miles being achieved by the 9th (Scottish) Division. The fighting continued until 16 May, with British and Commonwealth losses amounting to around 150, 000 men; the Germans lost a similar number, possibly less.

The British achievements led to the dismissal of the commander of the German Sixth Army, General Ludwig von Falkenhausen. It was claimed that he had kept his reserves too far to the rear, which meant that they were unable to make an effective contribution until after the British had made their great gains of territory. The war, though, had not been won in in two days and Lieutenant General Allenby, in charge of the Third Army in the centre, was blamed by Haig for failing to completely defeat the Germans. The two men had disagreed before the battle and Allenby had been told that if the great victory that Haig sought was not achieved, Allenby would be held responsible. Allenby was dismissed and sent to Palestine. ●

LEFT: A shell explodes amongst barbed-wire defences on Vimy Ridge, 1917. (LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA; PA-001380)

RIGHT: A contemporary drawing depicting a cemetery on Vimy Ridge following the fighting in 1917. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

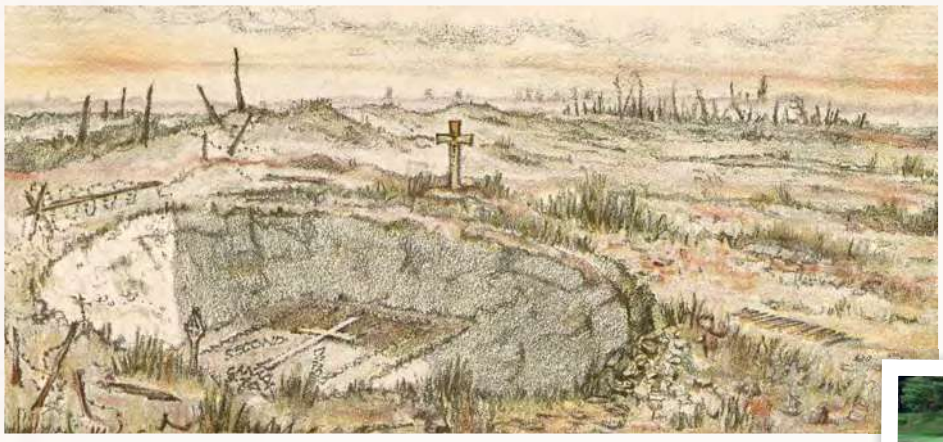
THE BATTLE AT VIMY RIDGE

9 APRIL 1917

Vimy Ridge stands high above the rolling plains of Northern France. The German positions crowning the sharp escarpment were considered to be the strongest in the whole of the region. As part of the Battle of Arras, the British and Commonwealth contribution to the Nivelles Offensive, the four divisions of the Canadian Corps and one British were to scheduled to attack the ridge on the morning of 9 April. The ridge was held by three divisions of the German Sixth Army.

An assault on such a formidable position required careful planning. From their posts high above the Canadian lines, the Germans were able to observe almost all movement. Well aware of this, the Canadians used tunnels to take troops forward, protected and unseen. There were two major cave systems in the Arras area which dated from the seventeenth century. These were extended and enlarged by Tunnelling Companies to create space for 11,000 men. These were fitted out with electric lights, running water and ventilation systems. To help the movement of men and munitions light railways were laid, and the tunnels, or subways, which ran for more than a kilometre, included hospitals, ammunition stores, mortar and machine-gun posts and communication centres. The British gallery network beneath Vimy Ridge eventually grew to a length of seven and a half miles.

BELOW: Canadian machine-gunners dig themselves in on Vimy Ridge, April 1917. This shows squads of machine-gunners operating from shell craters in support of the infantry on the plateau above the ridge. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)



As the Canadians had the most difficult task of the Allied attacking forces, they were allocated twenty-four brigade artillery groups consisting of 480 18-pounder field guns, 138 4.5-inch howitzers and 120 mortars, supplemented by 245 siege guns and heavy mortars. This gave the Canadians one heavy gun for every twenty yards and one field gun for every ten yards – which was three times the number deployed at the Battle of the Somme. For these weapons there were 1,600,000 shells, which included the new No.106 instantaneous percussion shrapnel fuze. This was a highly sensitive fuze which was activated when the nose of the shell made physical contact with the slightest object like a strand of barbed-wire or the surface of the ground. This meant that for the first time the artillery could effectively blast barbed-wire defences into pieces. The RFC also deployed very large numbers of aircraft over the ridge to provide the British and Canadian gunners with accurate observation.

Another development which was to aid the Canadians was that previously, because of security concerns, it was only officers who knew the precise details of the attack. This time the rank and file were trusted and not only were they trained and briefed fully about the nature of the attack and the enemy's defences, they were also issued with maps. So, where in the past if the officers were killed their men were largely ignorant of their surroundings and objectives, now the men could continue to operate effectively even if all their officers had been lost.

At 05.30 hours on 9 April the Canadians went over the top, launching themselves into a freezing blizzard. It was the first, and only time in the war that all four divisions fought side by side. Though the Germans were expecting an attack at any time, the majority of those occupying the front line were captured in their trenches as they sheltered from the shelling and the snowstorm.

'Walking, running and occasionally jumping across No Man's Land, the men followed closely the whitish-grey puffs that marked the exploding shrapnel of the barrage,' wrote G. Nicholson. 'Co-operating aeroplanes swooped low, sounding their klaxon horns and endeavouring to mark the progress of the troops in the driving snowstorm.'

Conditions underfoot in places hardly permitted the leaping around Nicholson had described, as Lieutenant Colonel Peck discovered: 'Going forward the mud was terrible. In one place I had to get out of my boots, climb on the bank of the sunken road and then pull out my boots after me.'

Resistance stiffened as the Canadians pushed deeper into the enemy positions. The men of the 16th Battalion (Canadian Scottish) Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) were pinned down by a German machine-gun, and Private W.J. Milne decided to do something about it: 'Crawling on hands and knees, he succeeded in reaching the gun, killing the crew with bombs and capturing the gun.' The battalion was able to continue its advance until stopped again by another machine-gun. Once more, William Milne crept forward and again captured the German gun, but this time it cost him his life, his body never being recovered. He was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross.

In similar fashion, Private J.G. Pattison dealt with a machine-gun that was holding up the 50th Battalion (Calgary) CEF: 'Pte Pattison, with utter disregard of his own safety, sprang forward, and jumping from shell-hole to shell-hole, reached cover within thirty yards of the enemy gun. From this point, in the face of heavy fire, he hurled bombs, killing and wounding the crew, then rushed forward, overcoming and bayoneting the surviving five gunners.' John George Pattison was also awarded the Victoria Cross, as were two other Canadians for their actions during the course of the battle.

ABOVE: The grounds of the Canadian National Vimy Memorial contain a number of preserved trenches and craters such as that seen here. The memorial park is open to the public year round. (COURTESY OF CHRIS DAVIES)

After four days of bitter fighting, the Canadians seized the ridge with the loss of 3,598 killed and 7,004 wounded. The capture of the ridge was considered to be Canada's finest achievement of the war. General Horne, the First Army commander, summarised the reasons for the Canadian success: 'The Vimy Ridge has been considered as a position of great strength; the Germans have considered it to be impregnable. To have carried this position with so little loss testifies to the soundness of plan, thoroughness of preparation, dash and determination in execution, and devotion of duty on the part of all concerned.'

The Germans, on the other hand, did not see the Battle of Arras as a defeat. This they based on the fact that they had held the ridge with just 30,000 to 40,000 troops who were attacked by 170,000 men, with no deeper breakthrough being achieved by the Allied forces.

LEFT: A machine-gun emplacement on the crest of Vimy Ridge and the men who drove the Germans from it during the Battle of Vimy Ridge. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

OFFENSIVE AT BULLECOURT

11 APRIL 1917

ABOVE: The Tank Memorial at Bullecourt. Unveiled in April 2010, the memorial commemorates the British tank crews that took part in the battle for the village in 1917. It stands adjacent to a section of tank track that belonged to Tank 586 commanded by Second Lieutenant Harold Clarkson. (PAUL KENDALL)

BELOW: Two German officers with the hulk of Second Lieutenant Harold Clarkson's Mk.II Female – the number '586' is visible its the rear. (COURTESY OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL)

By the beginning of April, the Germans were fully ensconced within their new positions along the Hindenburg Line, awaiting the inevitable Allied attack. That attack came quickly, with Haig ordering a general offensive along the Arras-Vimy front for the second week of April. This included an assault by Sir Hubert Gough's Fifth Army on a 3,500-yard front, with the heavily-defended village of Bullecourt as the primary objective. The attack would be accompanied by twelve tanks of 11 Company, 'D' Battalion, Heavy Branch Machine Gun Corps commanded by Major W.H.L. Watson.

Unfortunately, a very heavy snow-storm developed overnight and the tanks could not get to the start line in time for Zero Hour on 10 April 1917. Consequently, the attack was called off. Sadly, the 62nd (2nd West Riding) Division was not notified of the cancellation and continued its attack. Losses were heavy before news of the postponement reached the Divisional HQ.

Gough was insistent upon renewing the attack on the 11th, with Major Watson's tanks to lead the way. At 04.30 hours the tanks, divided into three sections, set off followed by two waves of infantry.

On the right, the tanks commanded by Second Lieutenant David Morris and Second Lieutenant Puttock, from Captain Wyatt's section of four, soon encountered problems. The clutch of Puttock's tank kept slipping and eventually gave out altogether. The tank was stranded helplessly in No Man's Land. He had the choice of either remaining in his armoured vehicle or of risking leaving the tank to find shelter in a shell hole. Whilst considering this, the tank was hit by a German shell. The tank was damaged but still drivable and Puttock managed to overcome the clutch problem and he set off again, only to be 'obliterated' by shell-fire shortly afterwards. Morris' tank was also hit by German shells but succeeded in working its way along the German trenches for 1,000 yards, destroying numerous machine-gun emplacements, before successfully returning to the British lines.

The remaining two tanks of Wyatt's section both reached the German trenches. Second Lieutenant Harold Clarkson reached the first objective ahead of the infantry but as he was approaching the second line of German trenches he came under direct artillery fire. Clarkson was forced to turn back but his tank was put out of action by shell-fire as it reached the first trench line. The crew abandoned their vehicle, but Clarkson was killed.

Second Lieutenant Harold Davies, meanwhile, headed for the second German line before he also came under concentrated artillery and mortar fire. This the tank seemed able to sustain, but it soon became the victim of a smaller-calibre weapon when a German officer used a machine-gun to fire some 1,200 rounds of armour-piercing ammunition at the tank from a distance of just 150 yards. As Davies swung round, three bullets penetrated the petrol tank. This ignited and in the roaring furnace the ammunition store exploded. The crew, who were burnt and some injured, baled out and were captured. However, Davies, like Clarkson, was killed.

Captain Fields' three tanks in the centre achieved even less than those of Wyatt's section. They were silhouetted against the snow-covered depressions of the landscape and were easy targets. Lieutenant Eric Money's tank became entangled in the German wire. He tried to extricate himself by moving the tank backwards and forwards but he remained stuck. A shell hit the petrol tank which exploded. All the crew were either burnt to death or killed when they escaped from the machine.

Lieutenant Macllwaine's tank did not even reach the wire. It was disabled by a shell which hit one of its tracks. The crew evacuated the tank which was hit again and destroyed. The third tank, commanded by Lieutenant Arthur Bernstein, was hit as it followed Money's tank towards the German wire. The shell decapitated the driver and wounded the corporal in the arm. The tank filled up with smoke and the crew baled out.

Over to the left of the attack, Lieutenant Hugh Swears' four tanks were late arriving at the start line. When they eventually moved out across No Man's Land, two of the tanks were hit by shell-fire and abandoned before they reached the German wire.

Second Lieutenant Cuthbert Birkett's tank did manage to enter the German line where it worked its way along the trenches towards Bullecourt. Even though the tank was hit twice by German shells and everyone inside was wounded, Birkett pushed on taking out an enemy mortar. Having achieved his objective, Birkett then attempted to return to the Australian lines. However, he lost his bearings and climbed out of the tank to assess his position. At that moment the tank was hit by a shell. Birkett's leg was shattered and the rest of the crew evacuated the burning vehicle.

Second Lieutenant Hugh Skinner's tank did not arrive at the front until four hours after the battle had begun due to mechanical problems, but eventually reached Bullecourt. Despite coming under heavy machine-gun fire, it 'cruised about the village', firing on any Germans visible.

The infantry could not keep up with the tank and Skinner found himself alone and unsupported in Bullecourt. When he

ABOVE: German soldiers pose for a photograph by Second Lieutenant Harold Davies' abandoned Tank 799 on the Bullecourt battlefield. (PAUL KENDALL)

RIGHT: German soldiers inspect Second Lieutenant Harold Clarkson's abandoned and badly damaged Tank 586 from the relative safety of their trenches in the Hindenburg Line. This knocked-out tank was also used as a German dugout, accessed under the front of the hull. (COURTESY OF THE TANK MUSEUM)

encountered an impassable crater, Skinner tried to reverse but could not engage gear. The tank was now helpless. With the Germans preparing a trench mortar to fire on the motionless tank, Skinner ordered his crew to abandon ship. The crew succeeded in returning to their lines. With the disabling of Skinner's tank all mechanised support for the attacking troops ended.

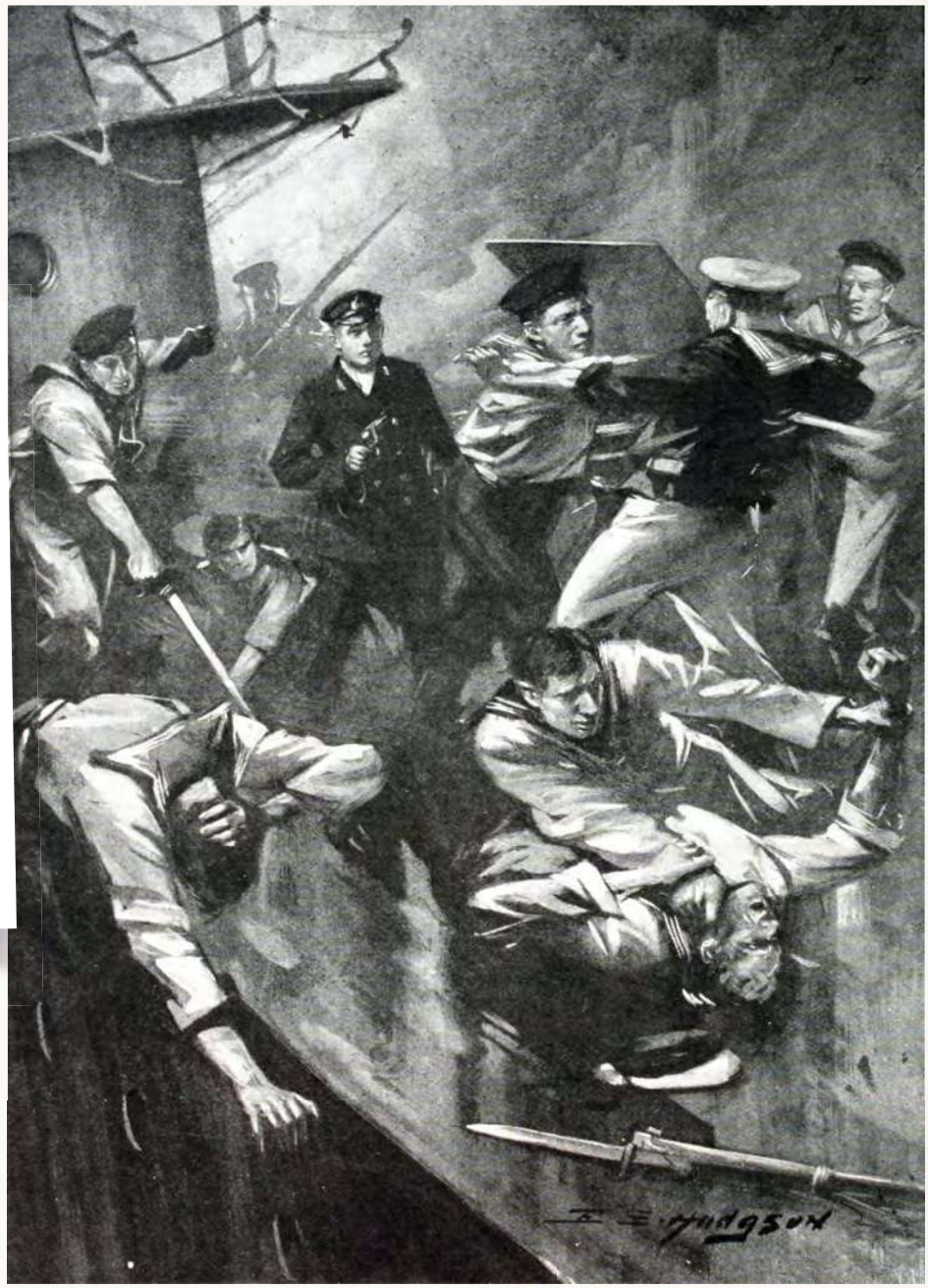
The Australians did capture part of the German line but when the Germans counter-attacked they were unable to hold on to their gains because of a lack of ammunition.

It would be almost a month before Bullecourt was attacked again. In the intervening period the attack was rehearsed twice, more ammunition was provided for the infantry as well as additional Mills Bombs. More artillery pieces were brought to the front and practice of the 'creeping' barrage, which had first been used on 9 April in the successful capture of Vimy Ridge, undertaken. Ten tanks were available, but the Australians declined to use them. The attack was of only limited success.

BELOW: The village of Bullecourt as it is today. This photograph was taken from the approximate location of the front of the Germans' Hindenburg positions. The deep German trench went forward in the centre of the photograph and veered off to the left to loop around in front of the village. The second German trench followed path of the road seen on the right and swung around behind the village. (COURTESY OF THEMOLK)

On 18 March 1917, during a dark night period when no moonlight could expose their movements, a flotilla of German torpedo boats crept up to the Dover Barrage which ran across the Dover Strait. They waited for the Royal Navy patrol to approach and turn before they pounced. They torpedoed and sank the destroyer HMS *Paragon*, making good their escape back across the Channel without loss.

ABOVE: Commander Edward Ratcliffe Garth Russell Evans, or 'Evans of the Broke' as he would forever be known after the events of April 1917. For his actions that day, Evans was immediately promoted to the rank of Captain and awarded the Distinguished Service Order. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)



BATTLE IN THE CHANNEL

20 APRIL 1917

Inspired by this success, the Germans attempted an even bolder enterprise barely a month later. This time a flotilla of destroyers planned an attack upon Dover and Calais. The night of 20 April was fine but the sky was overcast and there was no moon. Conditions were ideal for the mission. The skipper of the Faulknor-class destroyer HMS *Broke*, on patrol in the Strait in company with the destroyer HMS *Swift*, fully expected the Germans to make an appearance.

Six German destroyers slipped across the Channel and when they were about three miles off Dover they bombarded the town. As gun flashes flickered across the water, the two Royal Navy destroyers set off at high speed to intercept the raiders. Unable to locate them, the British ships returned to the eastern end of their allotted area.

As *Broke* and *Swift* patrolled cautiously they eventually spotted the enemy vessels seven miles east of Dover. 'The vessels were steaming quickly to the eastward in line ahead,' observed Commander Edward Ratcliffe Garth Russell Evans of HMS *Broke*. 'They immediately opened fire, which the *Swift* returned, firing her three guns as she passed down the line at full speed. Nothing could have suited us better than the situation on meeting, for although the comparison of numbers and armaments left us at a great disadvantage, the *Broke*'s right ahead fire of four 4-inch guns under easy control from the bridge was more than equal to the broadside of any single German destroyer.'

As both Royal Navy vessels bore down on the raiders, guns blazing, Evans' crew fired a torpedo which slammed into the German

torpedo boat *G.85*. Evans spun the helm hard over to try and ram the next German ship: 'I put the wheel hard aport, righted it and then we watched. Those in the destroyer we intended to run down had gathered what our intention was, but for them it was too late to stop. A cloud of smoke and sparks belched forth from their funnels and we got a momentary whiff of this as we tore towards her; it all happened in a few seconds, and the feeling of exhilaration as we were about to strike her can never be repeated.

'At the moment we crashed into her port side, abreast of the port funnel, my enthusiasm overcame me, and I shouted out, "That means two months' leave!"' The bow of *Broke* cut its way through the flank of the German destroyer *G.42*.

LEFT: A contemporary artist's depiction, 'based on the accounts of eyewitnesses', of the hand-to-hand fighting on board HMS *Broke* following the ramming of the German *G.42*. (ALL IMAGES HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS UNLESS STATED OTHERWISE)

'The *Broke*, steaming at twenty-seven knots, whirled this destroyer practically on her beam-ends, so that she could not fire. It must have been a dreadful moment for those on board her. One of her torpedo tubes stuck into our side, and was wrenched right off its mountings. Our guns, which would bear at maximum depression, were turned on to this wretched ship, and we literally squirted four-inch shell into the helpless vessel.'

With the two ships locked together, there was a danger that the fighting might become close up and personal. On *Broke* there were usually three loaded rifles, with bayonets fixed, at each gun, and one at each torpedo tube and the after searchlight. There were also cutlasses on the upper deck as well as many loaded pistols on the bridge. All Petty Officers also carried revolvers. So when Lieutenant Despard piped 'Boarders', his men were armed in moments.

'In a few seconds after the shock of the collision had been felt,' continued Evans, 'a deadly fire was poured from our fore part into the huddled mass of men who, terror-struck, were grouped about the enemy destroyer's decks. Many of them clambered up our bow and got on to the forecastle, to meet with instant death from our well-armed seamen and stokers. There was no question of the enemy boarding us with the idea of inflicting damage. They came on board to save their own lives, but in the confusion of the action the *Broke*'s men took no chances.'

As the battle raged, Evans' crew continued to shell passing targets and fire torpedoes. With *G.42* well alight and slipping lower and lower into the water, the other German vessels turned away to escape; HMS *Swift* followed in pursuit. Despite the darkness of the night the enemy warships could be seen with flames erupting from their funnels as they steamed at full speed. Evans tried to join *Swift* in the chase but *Broke* was now on fire amidships and on the bridge and the loud hiss of escaping steam indicated that the ship was in no condition to maintain the pursuit.

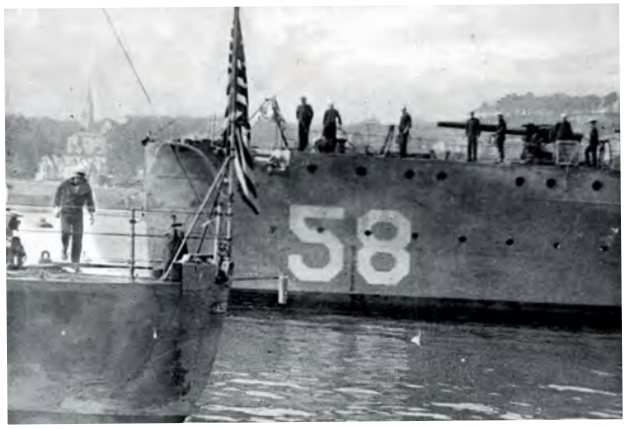
Having participated in the rescue of survivors from *G.85* and *G.42*, Evans' men set about dealing with their own problems: 'I walked round our decks, which were all slippery with blood, and found the doctor identifying the dead. When they had been collected and reverently covered with flags, the remainder of the ship's company scrubbed down and white-washed over all the blood-splashed places so that nothing horrid remained to hurt the eye or to remain one of this, the grim aspect of the story.'

HMS *Broke* was eventually towed into harbour. She had suffered fifty-seven casualties, of whom twenty-one were killed. As the destroyer entered Dover it received a warm reception. 'One could not help feeling a bit lumpy in the throat,' Evans admitted, 'when the other ships' companies cheered us again and again'.

ABOVE: The survivors of HMS *Broke*'s crew mustered for the press in the aftermath of the engagement in the Dover Strait. Such was the damaged sustained by the destroyer that it remained in dock for several weeks.

LEFT: One member of HMS *Broke*'s crew involved in the action on the night of 20/21 April 1917 was Able Seaman William George Rawles – seen here. 'Although he had four bad wounds in his legs, in addition to other injuries, he continued to steer HMS *Broke* in action until the enemy destroyer had been rammed,' ran the words of the announcement of his Conspicuous Gallantry Medal.

ABOVE: Evans was commissioned into the Royal Navy in 1897 and prior to the First World War had already gained fame for his involvement in Scott's Second Antarctic Expedition of 1910 to 1913. His involvement came about, at Scott's request, following his service as second officer of *Morning*, the relief vessel of Scott's first Antarctic expedition in 1901-1904. Following Scott's death in 1913, Evans brought the expedition's survivors home to the UK. He is seen here with the instrument used in the expedition to fix the position of the South Pole. It is said that Evans always carried a penguin mascot nailed to the mast of HMS *Broke*.



ABOVE: Another of the six destroyers in Taussig's division was USS *Conyngham* (DD-58), pictured here moving slow ahead to moor next to unidentified sister ship at Queenstown.

ABOVE: A number of US destroyers, including the USS *Jacob Jones* and USS *Wadsworth*, which both formed part of the first arrivals, pictured alongside the destroyer tender USS *Melville* at Queenstown in 1917. (US NAVAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE COMMAND)

FIRST US DESTROYERS ARRIVE

On 6 April 1917 the United States declared war on Germany. Less than a month later, on 4 May 1917, a division of US Navy destroyers arrived in Queenstown (now Cobh), Ireland – the first American warships to be deployed in the war zone. The destroyers' CO was Commander Joseph K. Taussig, USN.

It was at five minutes past midnight on the morning of 25 April, with his ship at sea fifty miles off Cape Cod, that Taussig opened his sealed orders. The document included the following instructions: '(1) The British Admiralty have requested the cooperation of a division of American destroyers in the protection of commerce near the coasts of Great Britain and France. (2) Your mission is to assist naval operations of Entente Powers in every way possible. (3) Proceed to Queenstown, Ireland. Report to Senior British Naval Officer present, and thereafter cooperate fully with the British Navy. Should it be decided that your force act in cooperation with French Naval Forces your mission and method of cooperating under French Admiralty authority remain unchanged.'

The voyage across the Atlantic was far from smooth, as Taussig noted in his diary on 3 May: 'The past week has been a most uncomfortable one. For six days we travelled eastward with half a gale, the wind blowing steadily from SSE, giving us a rough sea on our starboard beam. We have been steaming at 12 knots, which was sufficient for the state of the sea, and we have been rolling so much that the mess table has not been set up since April 25th.'

The weather soon calmed down, as Taussig went on to point out: 'We had a beautiful day on the 4th – the day of our arrival at Queenstown. The *Mary Rose* continued with us and led us by the Daunt Rock lightship where a tug with the official photographer sent from London took moving pictures of the division as we passed. Then we stopped just outside Roche's Point, and a British naval officer went on board each destroyer to pilot us to our berths. Lt. Commander [Thomas H.] Robinson, RN, was my pilot. With him came Commander E.RG.R. Evans, CB, RN, Captain of the British destroyer leader *Broke*, who has been assigned by the Admiralty to duty in connection with the American destroyers.'

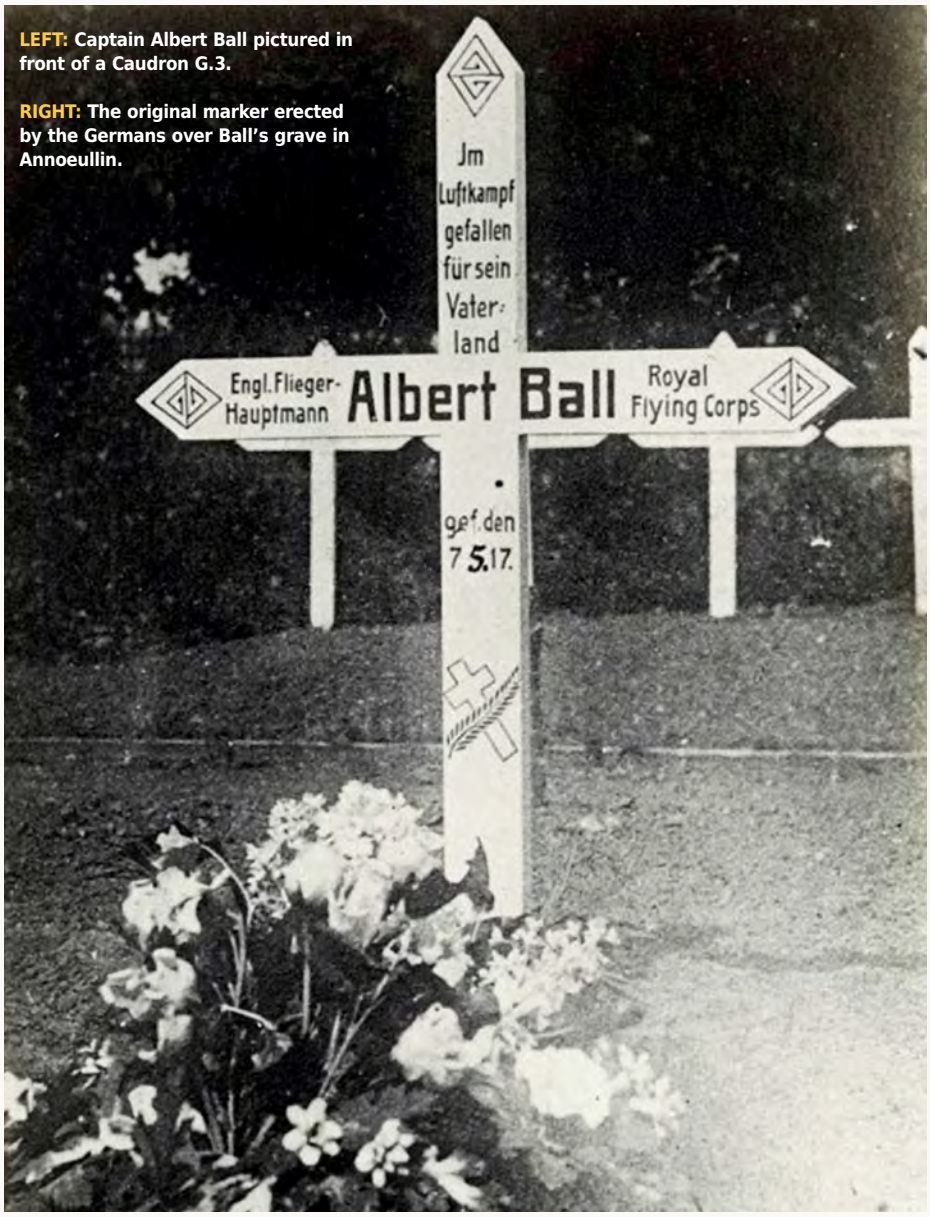
The US warships proceeded up the harbour, 1,000 yards apart, where they received a warm welcome. 'On the shore were many people waving,' noted Taussig, 'and as we passed Dog's Nose I heard cheers from the Army people on the port.' Once anchored or moored, a number of civic and official duties awaited Taussig and his men – not least of which was the re-enacting of the American CO stepping ashore so that it could be filmed for propaganda purposes!

BELOW: Commander Joseph Taussig's destroyer – the Tucker-class USS *Wadsworth* – pictured at anchor off Queenstown. Launched on 29 April 1915, *Wadsworth* was commissioned on 25 July the same year. (US NAVAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE COMMAND)

4 MAY 1917

18 MAY 1917

ALBERT BALL LISTED AS MISSING



LEFT: Captain Albert Ball pictured in front of a Caudron G.3.

RIGHT: The original marker erected by the Germans over Ball's grave in Annoeullin.

On 18 May the world was shocked by the news that the 'Ace of English Aces', the 'wonder boy of the Flying Corps', Albert Ball was officially being listed as missing by the British Government. The pilot who had shot down forty-three enemy aircraft and one German balloon had become Britain's most famous aviator, his exploits lauded in newspapers around globe. Now the news that he was missing stunned the British nation. What had happened to the twenty-year-old who had added an unprecedented three DSOs to his Military Medal?

Ball had joined the Army upon the outbreak of war in August 1914, receiving a commission into the Sherwood Foresters. By October that year, he had been promoted to Sergeant and then to Second Lieutenant the same month. On 15 October 1915, he obtained his Royal Aero Club Certificate and requested a transfer to the Royal Flying Corps. This was granted and after further training at Norwich and Upavon Ball was awarded his pilot's beret on 22 January 1916.

Ball soon began to notch up victories, often attacking large numbers of German 'planes by himself. On 22 August 1916 he destroyed three enemy aircraft in a single sortie, becoming the first British pilot to do so – a feat he was to repeat three times the following month.

His exploits captured the public imagination, as he received award after award, and when the announcement was made that Ball had gone missing there was widespread disbelief. No-one seemed to know what had happened. On the evening of 7 May he had led eleven aircraft of No.56 Squadron against a number of German machines, and in the ensuing dogfight, the aircraft became widely dispersed.

Ball was seen pursuing a German aircraft into a dark cloud, only to be spotted falling to earth enveloped in black smoke caused by oil leaking into the cylinders of his engine. His SE.5 crashed to the ground, and Ball was killed outright. Examination of the wreckage indicated that there was no sign of battle damage. It seemed that Ball had become disorientated and lost control as it was known that the SE.5 had to be upside-down for the oil to leak into the engine cylinders.

At first there was no information given on Ball's whereabouts. It was only at the end of May when the Germans dropped messages behind the British lines announcing that Ball was dead, and had been buried in Annoeullin with full military honours two days after he crashed, that the terrible news was confirmed.

The outpouring of public grief over the loss of Albert Ball could only lead to one result – the posthumous award of Britain's greatest honour, the Victoria Cross. Ball was remembered by the famous Manfred von Richthofen, the Red Baron, as 'by far the best English flying man'.

TRIAL CONVOY ARRIVES

BELOW: A scene more reminiscent of the Second World War – a trans-Atlantic convoy forms up, circa 1917, prior to setting out for British ports. (BOTH US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

18 MAY 1917

For much of its recent history Britain had been dependent on food imports to feed its population. Well aware of this the Germans attempted to starve Britain into surrender in the First World War by deploying their submarines against British and Allied merchant ships. A myriad of solutions were sought and tried. One, which many felt was too long in coming, was the introduction of convoys for merchant ships in 1917.

The discussions around convoys had been rumbling for some time when, on 27 April 1917, Admiral Jellicoe finally issued a detailed minute in favour of their adoption. The following day the Senior Naval Officer at Gibraltar was informed that a trial convoy would sail from there within ten days (there had been small local convoy arrangements already in place elsewhere, for example between Lerwick and Norway). A Convoy Commodore, Captain H.C. Lockyer, was duly appointed, and he arrived on The Rock on 7 May. Three days later a convoy of sixteen merchant ships had been collected. With masters and chief engineers briefed, the convoy sailed for the UK that very evening. An escort was provided by a pair of converted merchantmen, described as 'special service ships', and three armed yachts.

After a passage that was made without incident or loss, on 18 May the convoy was met by a force of destroyers sent out from Devonport. A Royal Naval Air Service flying boat, operating from the Scilly Isles, also provided aerial support. Much was learnt during the sailing, the chief issue being the inability of some vessels to maintain the correct speed and to make the many frequent changes in course.

ABOVE: Naval escorts, some of them US Navy vessels, at anchor prior to joining a convoy crossing the Atlantic.

Other developments were also taking place. On 17 May, the day before the Gibraltar convoy had sailed, the Admiralty, following on a Cabinet decision, appointed a Convoy Committee which, in conjunction with the Ministry of Shipping, was to draw up a plan to convoy merchant ships. In drawing its conclusions, the committee relied heavily on the Gibraltar trial. It worked quickly, and on 14 June the Admiralty formally approved a scheme for convoying merchant ships. The first regular convoy duly sailed from Hampton Roads, Virginia. In fact, four convoys, with the emphasis on oil tankers, sailed from Hampton Roads by the end of the month. Their safe arrival, noted one author, 'supplied a fairly conclusive answer to all who had doubted the success of the system in tactical grounds'.

Convoys outward bound from the UK did not commence until August. With time it was realised that the instructions issued in 1917 and early 1918 had resulted in too many small convoys sailing with an unnecessarily large escorts – with the resultant strain that placed on the Royal Navy. These problems aside, however, such were the results achieved one merchant seaman, Captain Cyril Falls, wrote: 'If losses went on rising as they rose in April [1917] – and what was to stop them? – the Central Powers would win the war ... We see now that the introduction of convoy acted like a spell.'

THE FORMATION OF THE IMPERIAL WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

On the eighth day of the Imperial War Conference at the Colonial Office in London, Friday, 13 April 1917, the heads of state from the self-governing dominions agreed to consider the method by which the remains of those who had died during the war should be treated. Under the heading, 'Care of Soldiers' Graves', it was noted that a draft charter had already been prepared by Fabian Ware for the Prince of Wales' Committee for the Care of Soldiers Graves. In this, is was related that because of the very sensitive nature of the subject, the interests of the deceased and their relatives would be best served by the formation of a new organisation, rather than the work being entrusted to an existing body. The only existing organisation at that time was the Directorate of Graves Registration and Inquiries, which was led by Brigadier, later Major General, Fabian Ware.

On the outbreak of war, Ware had tried to join the British Army, but at the age of forty-five he was rejected as being too old to fight. Nevertheless, he used his influence to obtain command of a mobile ambulance unit provided by the British Red Cross Society. In this role he became acutely aware of the lack of any official mechanism by which the graves of the fallen were recorded. He therefore set up his own organisation within the Red Cross, which received official recognition in 1915, ▸▸

ABOVE: Work underway on the construction of an IWGC cemetery. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

RIGHT: The blue plaque marking Fabian Ware's residence at 14 Wyndham Place, Marylebone.

BELOW: King George V and Sir Fabian Ware, on the left holding the papers, with other officers and dignitaries pictured during a visit to Tyne Cot Cemetery, Belgium, in the years after the formation of the Imperial War Graves Commission. (COURTESY OF THE COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION)

21 MAY 1917

being then transferred to the Army. By October 1915, the new Graves Registration Commission had over 31,000 graves registered, and 50,000 by May 1916.

The meetings of the Imperial Heads of State offered Ware the chance to put his ideas forward, with the men from the colonies fighting on every front throughout the Middle East, Africa, the Mediterranean and Western Europe. 'It was felt that the nation would expect the Government should undertake the care of the last resting places as those who had fallen,' Ware explained in the pre-amble to the charter. He pointed out that if proper provision was made for the dead then the country and the Empire, 'would be spared the reflections which weighed on the conscience of the British nation when, nearly twenty years after the conclusion of the Crimean War, it became known that the last resting places of those who had fallen in the war, except in individual instances, remained uncared for and neglected'.

The French Government, showing its gratitude for the sacrifices made by Britain and its Empire, generously passed a law under which the French nation undertook the whole cost of provision, in perpetuity, of the land required for the graves of Allied soldiers. It was expected that once the Germans had been evicted from Belgium, that nation's government would offer the same provision in its country. The British Government, for its part, agreed to maintain the graves, likewise in perpetuity. The basic building blocks were therefore in place; all that was required was for the whole operation of registering the graves of the fallen and interring them in suitable graveyards to be handed to Ware's proposed new body.

ABOVE: A number of war graves pictured in Jerusalem War Cemetery in the years after the Armistice. Jerusalem War Cemetery is three miles north of the walled city and is situated on the neck of land at the north end of the Mount of Olives, to the west of Mount Scopus. The large grave marker is that of Nursing Sister Charlotte Berrie, Queen Alexandria's Imperial Military Nursing Service, who died on 8 January 1919 aged 32. She was the sister of Mrs Gladys M. Macgrega of 12, Brightmore Street, Neutral Bay, Sydney, NSW, Australia. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

LEFT: The original Graves Registration Unit wooden cross that marked the lasting resting place of 36-year-old Major Lord Bernard Charles Gordon-Lennox, 2nd Company, 2nd Battalion Grenadier Guards, who was killed in action on 10 November 1914. The third son of the 7th Duke of Richmond and Gordon, and husband of Lady Evelyn Gordon Lennox, of Halnaker House, Chichester, Sussex, he was buried in Zillebeke Churchyard. This marker is today fixed to the wall of the Priory Church of St Mary and St Blaise at Boxgrove in West Sussex. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

This organisation, Ware suggested, could be founded by voluntary contributions from the Dominions and the UK, and partly by private donations. This, though, seemed an unsatisfactory way of treating those who had made the ultimate sacrifice. A far better idea, Ware suggested, was 'to create a permanent statutory organisation ... If this second course were adopted, an Act of the Imperial Parliament would probably be necessary to establish a Fund and to authorize gifts to that Fund. Similar Acts might have to be passed by the Dominion Parliaments. Commissioners would then be approved by Royal Warrant.'

With the number of registered graves already reaching more than 150,000, to allay any fears that that this organisation would cost too much to the countries already impoverished by war, Ware wrote: 'The staff required at the outset to complete the work of registration and to organise the burial grounds would be gradually reduced, until it was only of such dimensions as were required to supervise the maintenance of the cemeteries and to administer such funds as were necessary for the ceremonial visits which would be paid periodically to the cemeteries abroad and by which the memory of the dead would be honoured and the common sacrifices of the Allies would be recalled.'

Ware then pointed to the growing demand for suitable, official, recognition of the dead: 'The question of permanent memorials, whether of a collective or individual character, the erection of which at present is forbidden owing to military necessities, is so greatly agitating the public mind that there should be no more delay than is inevitable in satisfying public feeling on the question. Isolated appeals for funds in this connection from private individuals or dependent committees have already begun to appear in the newspapers.'

In conclusion, Ware wrote: 'If the Government of the United Kingdom, of the Dominions and of India are of opinion that the moral contingencies involved in the inadequate treatment of the graves of those who have fallen demand at least as much attention as the material result of the War, they will undoubtedly consider ... the matter.'

Such an appeal could not be ignored by the Imperial heads of state and Ware's proposal was accepted. The result was that on 21 May 1917, the Imperial War Graves Commission was established by Royal Charter, with the Prince serving as President and Ware as Vice-Chairman. It continues today as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

FIRST LARGE-SCALE DAYLIGHT RAID ON BRITAIN

25 MAY 1917

Realising the limitations of their airships, the Germans began to look at using their bomber aircraft that were now becoming available to them in increasing numbers. By the autumn of 1916, they began to plan Operation *Türkenkreuz* – a daylight bombing offensive against Britain using the powerful new Gotha bombers.

A lone bomber had dropped six bombs on London on the night of 28 November 1916, and the success of the mission encouraged the planners to undertake an all-out offensive. With a wingspan of seventy-seven feet, the Gotha IV carried a crew of three and a bomb load of over 600lbs of bombs, at a height of around 21,000 feet and at a speed of 90mph. It carried up to four machine-guns and, flying in formation, could easily defend itself from attacking fighters.

In anticipation of the campaign, Kampfgeschwader der Obersten Heeresleitung (Kagohl) 3, also known as the Englandgeschwader, was formed. Comprising six Kampfstaffel, it was commanded by *Hauptmann* Ernst Brandenburg. Operating from bases around the Belgian town of Ghent, Kagohl 3 took delivery of the first batch of Gothas in March and April of 1917.

It was not until 25 May 1917, however, that twenty-three Gothas took off for a daylight raid on London. Mechanical problems led to two turning back; the others crossed the Essex coast at 17.0 hours, though poor weather forced the German commander to turn south and aim for the important supply port of Folkestone on the Kent coast.

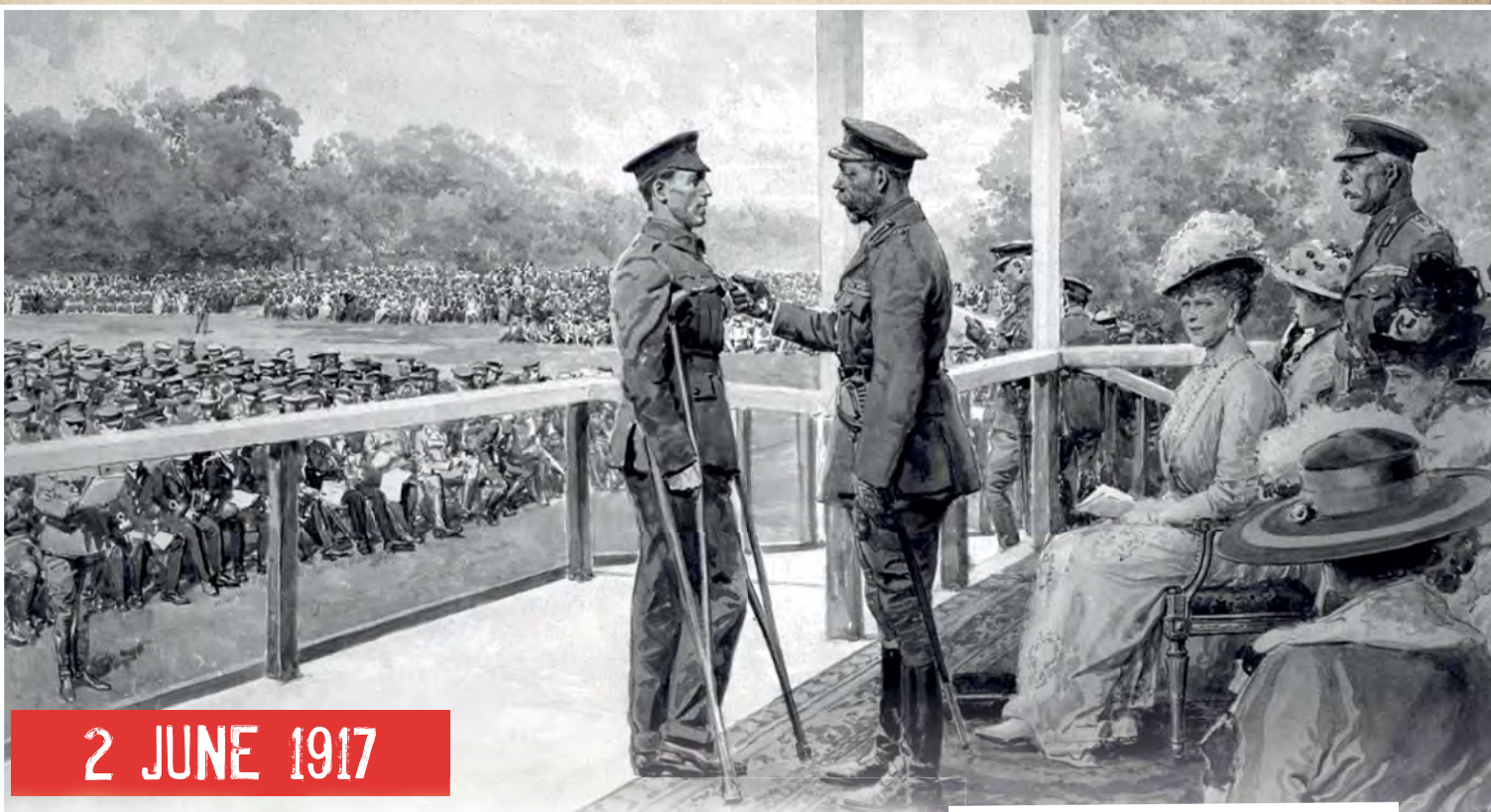
ABOVE: A commercially produced German postcard depicting members of ground crew bombing-up a Gotha G.V. The G.V entered service in August 1917. (BOTH HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

The author Thomas Fegan details what followed: 'They arrived there at 6.00 pm, after dropping several bombs on an airfield at nearby Lympne, and bombed the town and neighbouring Army camp at Shorncliffe. Those on the ground had no idea that they were German planes and no air raid warning had been given. The area near the docks was badly hit, especially Tontine Street with its crowded shops — there was carnage as a whole premises disappeared with its customers. After ten minutes of hell the Gothas flew home.

'RFC and RNAS aeroplanes pursued them, but the Gothas' formation largely held firm. One straggler was hit by Flight Sub-Lieutenant Reginald Leslie, RNAS, flying a Sopwith Pup, who saw smoke and steam pour from it. He could not confirm the kill, but he had the consolation of a Distinguished Service Cross for his valiant effort. Nine Pups of the RNAS squadrons at Dunkirk engaged the Gothas as they reached the Belgian coast at 18,000ft and claimed to have shot down one and seen another fall out of control. The Germans admitted the loss of only one.'

In total, ninety-five people died and 195 were injured, mostly in the Folkestone area. In Shorncliffe, eighteen soldiers (sixteen Canadian and two British) were killed, a further ninety were wounded. To the Germans, the raid was a great success. To the British public, it was a terrifying new menace.

German officers and aircrew inspect a Gotha G.IV bomber during a tour of *Kagohl* 3 at Ghent, shortly before the first Gotha raid on Britain, May 1917.



2 JUNE 1917

MASS INVESTITURE AT HYDE PARK

ABOVE: King George V awarding the Victoria Cross to Private Thomas Hughes, Connaught Rangers, during the investiture ceremony in Hyde Park on 2 June 1917. At Guillemont, France, on 3 September 1916, Hughes was 'wounded in an attack, but returned at once to the firing line after having his wounds dressed. Later, seeing a hostile machine-gun, he dashed out in front of his company, shot the gunner, and single-handed captured the gun. Though again wounded, he brought back three or four prisoners.' Hughes was seventeenth in line during the ceremony. (ALL IMAGES HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS UNLESS STATED OTHERWISE)

The afternoon of 2 June 1917 saw one of the largest investiture ceremonies ever seen in Hyde Park in London. An announcement detailing some of the proceedings was published in the press the same day. *The Times*, for example, stated the following:

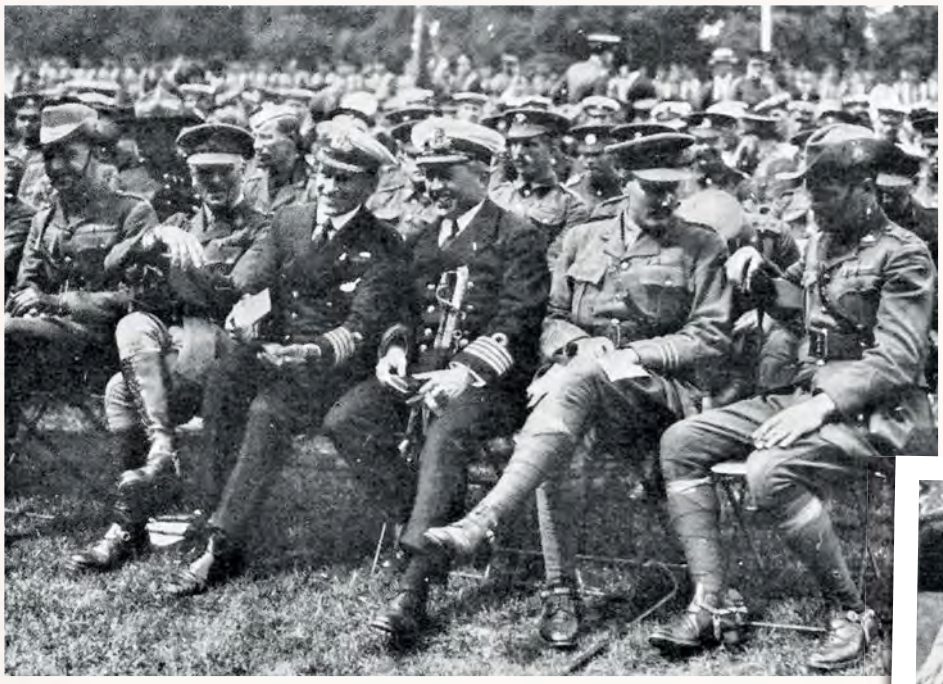
'The ceremony, which will be simple and impressive, will give to the people of London one of the rare opportunities they have had since the beginning of the war of expressing collectively their gratitude to the men who have fought and are fighting, and to the nurses who have tended them, and at the same time of demonstrating their loyalty to the Sovereign.

'Between Knightsbridge Barracks and the Serpentine an oval enclosure has been prepared. On one side a canopied pavilion has been erected, flanked by rows of chairs for the soldiers, sailors, and nurses who are to be decorated, and their relatives, a number of representatives of the British and Dominion and Allied Governments, members of both Houses of Parliament, and other ticket-holders. Arrangements have also been made for the accommodation of some of the American doctors and nurses now in this country. Around the remaining part of the enclosure, which will be kept by sentries, seats have been placed for about 150 wounded officers and 600 wounded soldiers from various hospitals in or near London. Behind the sentries there will, be ample space for thousands of the general public.

'The King and Queen will be received by Field-Marshal Viscount French and Lieutenant-General Sir Francis Lloyd. They will be escorted to the parade-ground by a detachment of First Life Guards, commanded by Major Lord Pearhyn, and a guard of honour of 100 men of the Scots Guards will be on duty in front of the Royal Pavilion. The Royal Standard will be broken as their Majesties alight, the guard of honour will give a Royal Salute, and the massed bands of the Brigade of Guards will play the National Anthem.'

ABOVE: The first soldier decorated during the investiture was Major Henry 'Mad Harry' Murray, seen here standing on the left. The visit to the UK for the ceremony enabled Murray to meet his uncle, Captain William Littler, and a cousin, Keith Adams, who was serving in the Royal Navy. (COURTESY OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL; P01465-003)

During the investiture, which lasted about two hours, a total of 351 awards were presented. This included eleven Victoria Crosses, four of them posthumously. In all, 313 servicemen received their awards



ABOVE: The first six recipients at the Hyde Park ceremony. From left to right they are Major Henry Murray (DSO and Bar, VC), Lieutenant-Colonel James Forbes-Robertson (DSO and MC), Captain Ambrose Peck (DSO), Captain Edward Evans (DSO), Lieutenant-Colonel Agar Adamson (DSO), and Lieutenant-Colonel Albert Fewtrell (DSO).

personally, whilst twenty-six were received by relatives. There were twelve awards of the Royal Red Cross to nurses.

The first individual to be presented to the King was Major Henry Murray, Australian Imperial Force. In its biography of 'Mad Harry' Murray, the Australian War Memorial called him 'the most highly decorated soldier in the Australian army; dashing, brave and handsome, Murray rose from the ranks to command a battalion'. The account goes on to state:

'He described his occupation as a "bushman" when he joined the 16th Battalion AIF in 1914, but Harry Murray was already a mature and independent leader of men ... It was soon evident that he was also a natural soldier. On Gallipoli he was promoted, awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, then commissioned as an officer in the 13th Battalion.

'The following year, in France, Murray's reputation grew, and he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) for his work at Mouquet Farm. Later, in January 1917, near Gueudecourt, in a night attack at Stormy Trench, he won the Victoria Cross. There, in fierce fighting, he fought off enemy counter-attacks and led a "brilliant charge". At Bullecourt in April, leading his troops with the cry, "come on men, the 16th are getting hell", he got a second DSO.' These were the awards presented by the King at Hyde Park.

'Murray was not a reckless hero, but rather a quiet and charismatic leader who believed in training and discipline and who possessed sound tactical skills,' continues the AWM biography. 'In May 1918 he was promoted lieutenant colonel to command the 4th Machine Gun Battalion. Further honours came; he was awarded the French Croix de Guerre and appointed Companion in the Order of St. Michael and St. George. Charles Bean described him as "the most distinguished fighting officer of the AIF".'

Following behind Murray in the presentations was Lieutenant-Colonel James Forbes-Robertson, Border Regiment attached Newfoundland Regiment, who received the DSO and MC. The next eight individuals were all decorated with the DSO – and included the names of Captain Ambrose Peck RN and Captain Edward Evans RN whose exploits on HMS *Swift* and HMS *Broke* respectively have been detailed on previous pages.

The DSO presentation were then followed by the award of VC and MC to Captain William Allen, Royal Army Medical Corps. Allen attended St Cuthbert's College before studying medicine at Sheffield University. He joined the RAMC a few days after the declaration of war against Germany, being commissioned as a Lieutenant on 8 August 1914. On 3 September 1916 Allen was attached to the 246th (West Riding) Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, when he undertook the actions near Mesnil in France for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

LEFT: The original caption to this image states that it shows 'an incident that touched the heart of the spectators'. A blind soldier is led up by an orderly to receive the Military Medal.

ABOVE: Among the spectators were some 600 wounded men, who, in this case, are wearing their 'hospital blues' - also known as 'Blighty blues'.

Allen was followed onto the platform by Second Lieutenant Frederick Palmer, Royal Fusiliers, who was presented with the VC and the MM. After him came a further four VC recipients.

Among the next-of-kin present were those who accepted the posthumous VCs awarded to Second Lieutenant George Cates, Rifle Brigade; Sergeant J. Erskine, Scottish Rifles; Sergeant T. Mottershead, RFC (who also featured earlier in this publication); and Private J. Fynn, South Wales Borderers.

A report in *The Illustrated London* states that 'a blinded soldier, who was led up by an orderly to receive the Military Medal, aroused the sympathies of all present. Among the spectators were some six hundred wounded men.'

Throughout the ceremony, the Queen remained on the platform with the King. Before departing at the conclusion of the investiture, all those decorated give three cheers for the King.

ABOVE: The OBE awarded to Frank Norman in 1918. Norman was a civil servant who helped arrange the evacuation of refugees from Belgium during the First World War. (COURTESY OF MICHAEL NORMAN-SMITH; EUROPEANA 1914-1918)

OBE ESTABLISHED

4 JUNE 1917

Though it was not published in *The London Gazette* until 24 August 1917, the Royal Warrant for the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire was signed by King George V on 4 June 1917. The order came about because of the King's desire to find a way in which to honour the many thousands of individuals who had served in a variety of non-combatant roles during the war.

In announcing the new decoration, *The Times* provided the following information: 'In recognition of' the manifold services, voluntary and otherwise, that have been rendered both by British subjects and their Allies in connexion with the war, the King has been pleased to institute two Orders ... the fist of these is an Order of Knighthood, to be styled "The Order of the British Empire," and to be conferred, as the title indicates, for services rendered to the Empire, whether at home or abroad. This Order will follow, in most respects, the precedents of other Orders of Knighthood; but it will consist of five classes and will be given to women as well as men.

'The first two classes will, in the case of men, carry the honour of Knighthood, and, in the case of women, the privilege of prefixing the title "Dame" to their names. The second order, which will be closely restricted in numbers, will be entitled the "Order of the Companions of Honour," and will consist of one class only,' to which women will be eligible equally with men.

'The Order will carry with it no title or precedence, and will be conferred upon a limited number of persons, for whom this special distinction seems to be the most appropriate form of recognition, constituting, as it will, an honour dissociated either from the acceptance, of title or the classification of merit. Both Orders, though created in connexion with the war, will doubtless survive it, inasmuch as they will be found to fill an important gap in the hierarchy of awards of honour for public services at the hands of the Sovereign.'

The same report also outlined the decoration's appearance: 'The badge of the Order, worn by the members of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd classes, takes the shape of a silver-gilt cross, enamelled pearl grey, in the centre of which, in a circle enamelled crimson, is a representation of Britannia seated. The circle contains the motto of the Order, "For God and the Empire." The star, worn by members of the first two classes, is an eight-pointed silver star, the centre of which bears the same device as the badge.

'The treatment of the badge for the 4th class is similar to that for the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd classes, except that it is smaller and is not enamelled. In the case of the 5th class, the badge is of silver instead of silver-gilt. A silver medal of the Order has been struck, and will be awarded to those persons, not being members of the Order, whose services to the Empire warrant such recognition. As in the case of other Orders, the members will have the privilege of placing the initials after their names.'

BELOW: The first awards of this new decoration were published on 24 August 1917. The first on the list was Field Marshal His Royal Highness The Duke of Connaught, seen here decorating a Belgian soldier in 1917 or 1918. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

THE CAPTURE OF MESSINES

BELOW: British troops manhandling a captured German 7.7cm FK 96n.A. field gun near Wytschaete, 10 June 1917, during the Battle of Messines. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

7 JUNE 1917

Though the great Nivelles Offensive planned by the French had largely failed, British successes at Arras and Vimy Ridge enabled Field Marshal Haig to be able to concentrate on the northern sector of the front at Ypres. As further British success was considered far more likely than that of their French counterparts, Haig was allowed to narrow his front to enable a greater concentration of effort, the French extending their front as far as the Omignon River.

The first stage in Haig's plan was to capture the German-held village of Messines. This is situated on the southern spur of the ridge of the same name, and it commanded a wide view of the valley of the Lys, as well as enfiladed the British lines to the south. North-west of Messines is the village of Wytschaete, situated at the point of the German salient and on the highest part of the ridge. From its height of about 260 feet it completely commanded the town of Ypres and the whole of the old British positions around the city. The capture, therefore, of the whole of the Messines Ridge was an essential prerequisite to any further campaign by the BEF in the area.

The offensives of the British had, by this stage of the war, become enormous operations. It had been found, at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives, that the most extensive and through preparations were the only way to offer any chance of success. The preparations for the attack on Messines had begun in late 1916 and included the building of new roads and the extension of old ones. Water pipes were laid, which by June 1917 were delivering between 450,000 and 600,000 gallons a day, and massive forward dumps of material were established. But what was the most notable preparation that was made for the attack upon Messines, was the digging mines under the German defences which, when detonated, would blow the enemy's field fortifications to pieces.

Work on the mines began with six and a half Tunnelling Companies which were joined by a further two at a later stage. At its peak, this effort amounted to nearly 4,000 British and Dominion tunnellers, supported by a roughly equal number of attached Pioneers and Infantry. Eventually, a total of twenty-five mines, containing more than a million pounds of explosives, were laid and primed under the Messines Ridge. The attack was set to take place on 7 June 1917.

On the evening of 6 June 1917, General Plumer, in command of the British Second Army, is reputed to have remarked: 'Gentlemen, we may not make history tomorrow, but we shall certainly change the geography.' How accurate his prediction would be was about to be tested.

ABOVE: Carefully prepared sand models for prior study by assaulting troops were frequently prepared ahead of offensives. This shows soldiers of the Second Army examining the Messines model which covered almost an acre. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

At 03.10 hours on 7 June 1917, within the space of just twenty-seven seconds, nineteen of the mines under Messines Ridge were fired. The effect was staggering.

The roar of the mines, and the accompanying barrage, was heard clearly ▸▸

ABOVE LEFT: This lake on the Messines Ridge marks the scar left on the battlefield by one of the explosions on 7 June 1917. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

ABOVE RIGHT: The crater left by the Spanbroekmolen mine, which was one of the largest of the mines blown by the British on 7 June 1917. Today the crater is also referred to as The Pool of Peace or the Lone Tree Crater.

ABOVE: A view of British officers' mess tent in front of Kemmel, Belgium, during the Battle of Messines on 10 June 1917. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

in London and even as far away as Dublin. Of the effect, General Ludendorff wrote: 'We should have succeeded in maintaining the position [on Messines Ridge] but for the exceptionally powerful mines used by the British which paved the way for the attack. The result of these successful mining operations was that the enemy broke through on the 7th of June. The morale effect of the explosions was simply staggering.' Approximately 10,000 men were killed by the explosions alone.

Haig described the attack that followed in his fourth official despatch: 'Covered by a concentrated bombardment, which overwhelmed the enemy's trenches and to a great extent neutralised his batteries, our troops swept over the German foremost defences all along the line.

'The attack proceeded from the commencement in almost exact accordance with the time-table. The enemy's first trench system offered little resistance to our advance, and the attacking brigades – English, Irish, Australian and Zealand – pressed on up the slopes of the ridge to the assault of the crest line.'

Nine divisions assaulted Messines behind a creeping barrage, supported by tanks, and gas delivered by Livens projectors. All the initial objectives were taken within three hours, and reserves brought forward from General Gough's Fifth Army and the French First Army under General Anthoine reached their own final objectives by mid-afternoon.

The surprise detonation of the mines and the speed of the Allied attack caused a breakdown in the German command structure, and also saw the capture of large numbers of Germans who were simply overrun. In total 7,200 men, sixty-seven artillery pieces, ninety-four trench mortars and 294 machine-guns were seized.

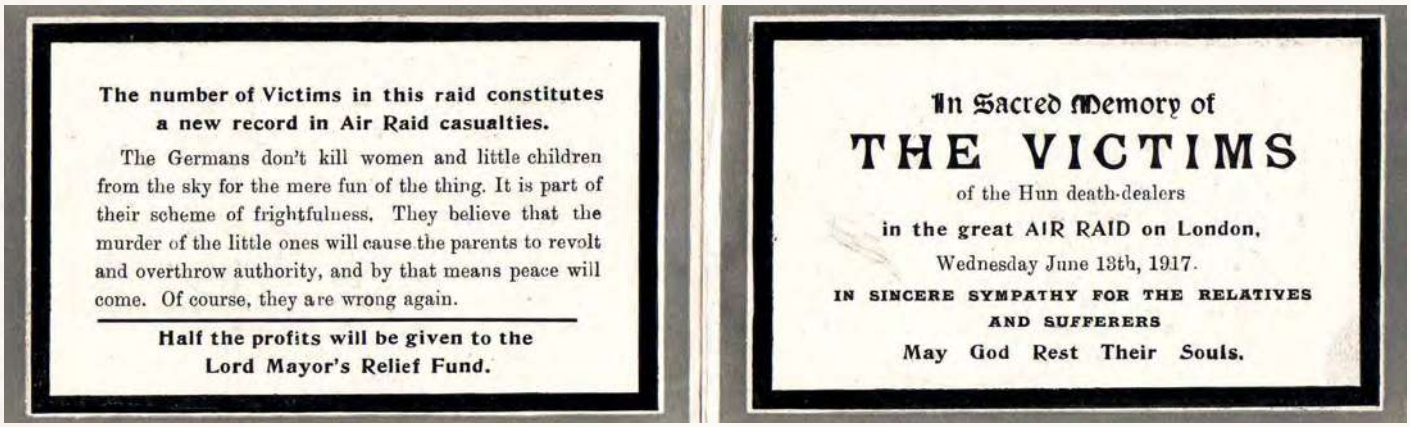
Despite German counter-attacks, by 14 June (when the battle officially ended) Messines and Wytschaete were in British hands. No longer could the Germans look down from the heights to direct their artillery upon Ypres. In all respects the battle was, unlike most of those that had preceded it, an unqualified success.

It is said that the Battle of Messines was the first time on the Western Front that defensive casualties considerably exceeded attacking losses, though no reliable totals can be obtained. If this is indeed the case, then such high losses inflicted on the Germans must be attributable to the devastating British mines, for which the attack upon Messines will always be associated.

As, ultimately, the Germans lost control of the heights, and suffered very heavy casualties in trying to maintain their hold on Messines and in their counter-attacks, Hindenburg retrospectively saw that he should not have attempted to defend the heights against an Allied force that far exceeded the strength of Crown Prince Rupprecht's XIX Corps

The capture of Messines, significant in itself, was, nevertheless, just part of the preliminary operations to pave the way for Haig's great offensive of 1917 – the deadly struggle which became known as the Third Battle of Ypres.

RIGHT: A group of German prisoners captured during the Battle of Messines, 8 June 1917. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)



The number of Victims in this raid constitutes a new record in Air Raid casualties.

The Germans don't kill women and little children from the sky for the mere fun of the thing. It is part of their scheme of frightfulness. They believe that the murder of the little ones will cause the parents to revolt and overthrow authority, and by that means peace will come. Of course, they are wrong again.

Half the profits will be given to the Lord Mayor's Relief Fund.

In Sacred Memory of

THE VICTIMS

of the Hun death-dealers

in the great AIR RAID on London,

Wednesday June 13th, 1917.

IN SINCERE SYMPATHY FOR THE RELATIVES AND SUFFERERS

May God Rest Their Souls.

ABOVE: A memorial card remembering those killed on 13 June 1917. (JON MILLS COLLECTION)

WORST AIR RAID ON LONDON

On 13 June 1917, eighteen Gotha bombers appeared in formation over London in broad daylight. Over ninety British fighters were sent against them but not one bomber was destroyed.

Hauptmann Brandenburg, the German CO, later recalled that, 'Visibility was exceptionally good. With perfect clearness, the Thames bridges, the railway stations, the city, even the Bank of England, could be recognized. The antiaircraft fire over London was not particularly strong and was badly directed ... Our aircraft circled round and dropped their bombs with no hurry or trouble.'

Flying at around 12,000 feet, the bombers dropped 100 bombs with most falling within a mile of Liverpool Street station. One struck the County Council school in Poplar, killing two children as it passed through the building before exploding in a ground floor nursery classroom where around sixty-four children were sheltering.

According to *The Times*, eighteen children were 'blown into unrecognizable fragments'. In all 162 people, all but four of them civilians, were killed and 432 injured. It was the highest death toll of the bombing so far. Air Commodore Lionel Charlton described the raid as 'the beginning of a new epoch in the history of warfare'.

Mrs C.S. Peel, the wife of a Special Constable, recalled taking shelter from the raid in a basement of Hyde Park House packed with women clerks working for the Admiralty. Many were crying in fear and one became hysterical, screaming that she would be killed. Thinking about the men at the front enduring attack day after day, she calmly expressed her hope that the girl would be killed. It shocked them all into a relative calm.

Leaving the basement, Mrs Peel found the streets deserted except for a butcher's boy on a bicycle and an old woman selling flags for the war effort. It was only later, on the way home, that the shock hit her. She found herself weeping on the bus and saying 'I can't bear this, it's too much'.

At the Gaiety Theatre a bomb that fell nearby caused dust to fall onto the audience. An officer on leave grabbed the arm of his girlfriend and repeated quietly, 'it's no business to happen here, you know, it's no business to happen here'. Afterwards, he explained that to be bombed in Britain 'seemed to destroy something in him'.

The public was outraged. This single attack had caused more damage than all the Zeppelin raids combined. Over the coming weeks, Londoners would be subjected to increasingly devastating strikes by the enemy bombers. Despite what the authorities and propaganda stated, people were scared. The attacks were rapidly wearing down morale.

For the first time, children were evacuated from the most threatened areas and, as the raids continued, people were injured as crowds stampeded into the Underground whenever an aircraft appeared. By the end of the summer, 200 fighters needed on the Western Front were tied up on Home Defence duties.

LEFT: A damaged building at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, following the attack by twenty Gotha G.Vs on 13 June 1917. This was the first of two daylight Gotha GV raids on London. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

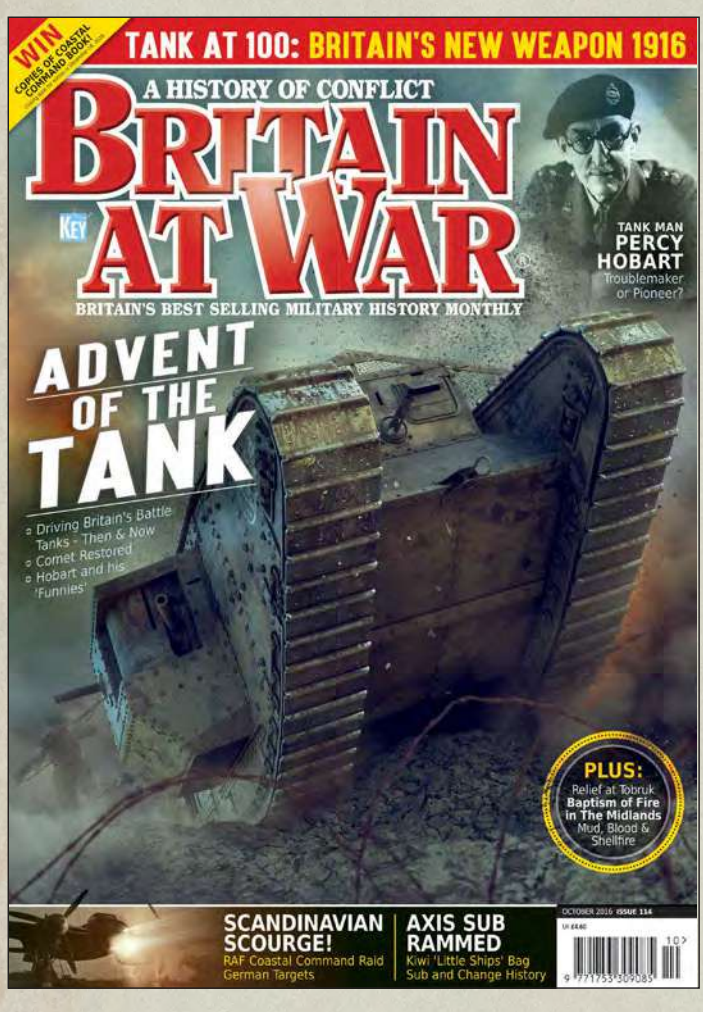
GREAT SUBSCRIPTION OFFERS FROM KEY

SUBSCRIBE

TO *YOUR* FAVOURITE MAGAZINE

AND SAVE

1917 Special


WIN COPIES OF COASTAL COMMAND BOOKS
TANK AT 100: BRITAIN'S NEW WEAPON 1916
A HISTORY OF CONFLICT
BRITAIN AT WAR
BRITAIN'S BEST SELLING MILITARY HISTORY MONTHLY
TANK MAN PERCY HOBART
Troublemaker or Pioneer?
ADVENT OF THE TANK
Driving Britain's Battle Tanks - Then & Now
Comet Restored
Hobart and his 'Funnies'
PLUS:
Relief at Tobruk
Baptism of Fire in The Midlands
Mud, Blood & Shellfire
SCANDINAVIAN SCOURGE!
RAF Coastal Command Raid German Targets
AXIS SUB RAMMED
Kiwi 'Little Ships' Bag Sub and Change History
OCTOBER 2016 ISSUE 114

Britain at War is dedicated to exploring every aspect of Britain's involvement in conflicts from the turn of the 20th century through to modern day. From World War I to the Falklands, World War II to Iraq, readers are able to re-live decisive moments in Britain's history through fascinating insight combined with rare and previously unseen photography.

www.britainatwar.com

PUT TO GOOD USE
Les Freathy goes through his photo archives to reveal how some REME MG half-tracks were used in post-war Britain

Classic Military Vehicle magazine is the best selling publication in the UK dedicated to the coverage of all historic military vehicles. From the turn of the 20th century, right up to the Gulf War of the 1990s, all kinds of military hardware that featured in conflicts around the world is profiled extensively every month. With coverage of the people and the shows that also make up this fascinating scene, superb photography and great archive material.

www.cmvmag.co.uk

ALSO AVAILABLE DIGITALLY:

Available on iTunes | Available on the App Store | Available on Google play | Available on BlackBerry | Available on kindle fire | Available on PC, Mac & Windows 10

Available on PC, Mac, Blackberry and Windows 10 from pocketmags.com

970/16

FOR THE LATEST SUBSCRIPTION DEALS

VISIT:
www.keypublishing.com/shop

PHONE:
(UK) 01780 480404 (Overseas) +44 1780 480404

The memorial commemorating those killed in the explosion on 13 June 1917. A stainless steel work by sculptor Paul Margetts, it is located on the corner of the Welbeck Street North and Stamford Street West in Ashton-under-Lyne. (COURTESY OF GERALD ENGLAND; WWW.GEOGRAPH.ORG.UK)

13 JUNE 1917

ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE EXPLOSION

Inside St Peter's Primary School in Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancashire, is a brass plaque. It commemorates the death of seven of its pupils who were killed on 13 June 1917. The time was 16.20 hours and the schoolchildren were walking home when a massive explosion occurred at the Hooley Hill Rubber and Chemical Works on William Street.

With the demands from the front for ever more shells, the company had turned over to munitions manufacture, even though the factory was surrounded by houses and nearby were two gasometers. On that June afternoon, Sylvain Dreyfus, who had founded the company along with Lucien Gaisman, was working with a young chemist called Nathan Daniels in the nitrating section of the works when the contents of No.9 nitrator became unstable. Despite a frantic effort led by Dreyfus to bring the reaction under control, the contents of the vessel boiled over and set fire to the wooden staging around it. The fire quickly took hold, spreading to the roof of the building.

There was now a desperate effort by all the factory workers to halt the spread of the fire which was creeping ever-closer to a storage area where five tons of TNT – a fifth of a normal week's production – was held. Despite their endeavors, the TNT ignited.

In the devastating blast that followed most of the workers on the site were killed and the factory was literally blown apart. The place where the TNT had been stored disappeared, leaving a five-foot-deep crater some ninety feet by thirty-six feet across. The two gasometers were ripped apart and caught fire, sending fireballs soaring into the air. Hundreds of buildings were damaged, many being almost completely destroyed. Altogether forty-three people were killed and a further 120 hospitalised. Amongst the dead were eleven children, including the seven walking home from St Peter's Primary School. Another child died whilst swimming when glass in the roof of the Swimming Baths was blown in.

The local authorities and the Government were quick to respond. In the House of Commons the following day, Mr Worthington Evans, the Parliamentary Secretary, responded to a question from Bonar Law about the explosion: 'The Government will bear the expense of the funerals, the arrangements for which I understand the town council are prepared to undertake. I am advised that the company owning the works is primarily liable to pay compensation to its workpeople; the Government will, however, make good any deficiency in respect of their reasonable claims. As regards other claims, the Government propose to deal with them on the same principles as in the Silvertown case.'

The irony of this sad tale is that on the day of the explosion, co-owner Lucien Gaisman had been in London to discuss the possible closure of the plant as small works such as the Hooley Hill factory were considered to be less economically viable than the more modern and larger sites elsewhere in the country.

ABOVE: Workers in a small munitions factory – in this case what appears to be a factory involved in the manufacture of the actual shells. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

ZEPPELIN L.48 SHOT DOWN

17 JUNE 1917

In January 1915, Great Yarmouth became the first English town to be bombed from the air by a Zeppelin. East Anglia would continue to suffer aerial attacks and on the night of 16/17 June 1917, Zeppelin *L.48*, which had been part of a force of four airships, found itself drifting slowly over Orford Ness on the Suffolk coast.

From Orford Ness the airship rounded Wickham Market, and *Leutnant zur See* Otto Mieth took charge of the bombing run. Mieth unleashed a series of nine bombs on the village of Falkenham, some five miles north-east of Harwich. *L.48* then turned west and north, unloaded thirteen bombs on the fields around the village of Kirton, before dropping the last of its deadly cargo on Martlesham near Ipswich.

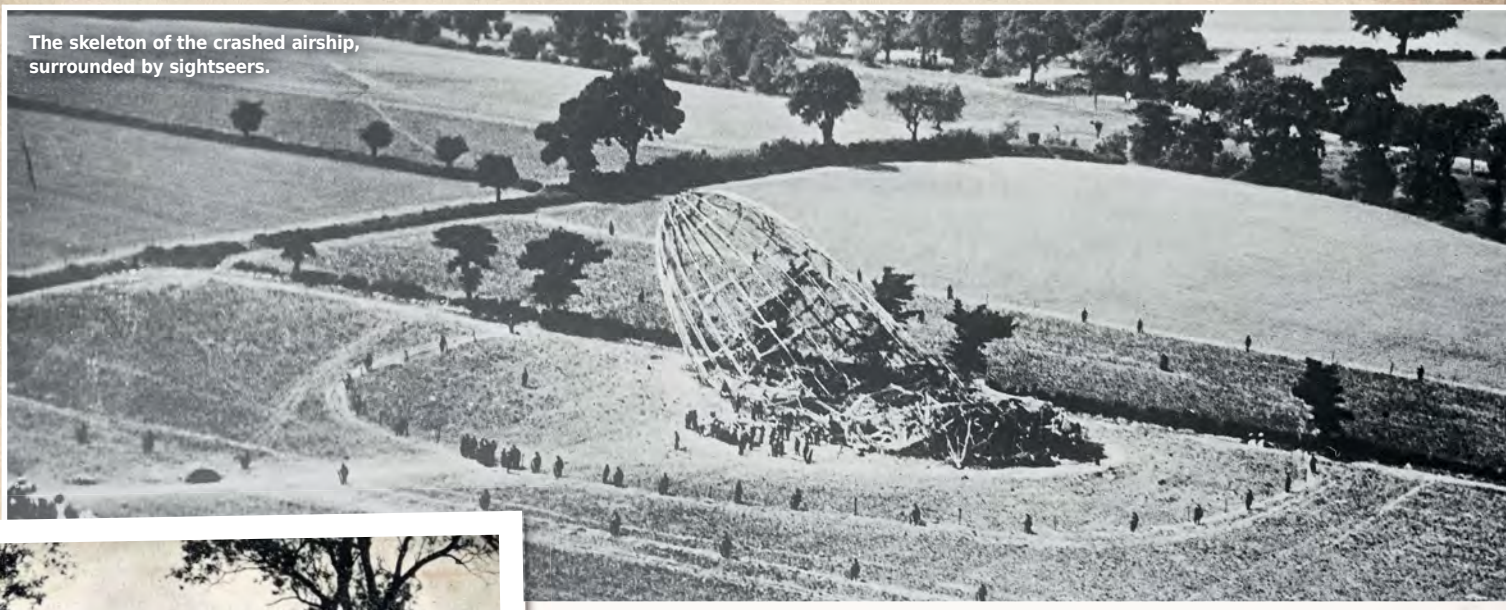
Once the bombs had been released the airship's crew believed they were heading East back for home. However, the compass had frozen and was giving an incorrect reading. Instead of heading east out over the North Sea as planned, *L.48* was now heading north along the coast.

Within a few minutes the German crew realised its mistake but valuable time had been lost and to add to their problems the forward engine failed. Gradually, the Zeppelin's speed began to slow.

At this point anti-aircraft guns that were located both on coastal emplacements and on several ships out at sea opened fire. Searchlights flicked on and wavered about the sky, searching out the intruder. Finally, the fingers of light homed in on *L.48*, and it now became a very inviting target for patrolling aircraft, including that flown by Second Lieutenant E.W. Clarke. Based at the SRFC Armament Experimental Station at Orford Ness; he was the first to approach the airship. Clarke flew close to the slow-moving Zeppelin discharging a total of four drums of Lewis gun ammunition – but with no apparent effect at all.

The second aeroplane to attack, at almost the same time, was a Royal Aircraft Factory FE.2b (serial B401). Crewed by Second Lieutenant Frank D. Holder and Sergeant Sidney Ashby, this aircraft had taken off from Orford Ness just after Clarke's. This crew also fired four drums of Lewis ammunition along with a further thirty rounds from a fifth drum when their machine-gun suddenly jammed. ▸▸

A dramatic depiction of Zeppelin *L.48* under attack in the skies over Suffolk on the night of 16-17 June 1917. (ARTWORK BY JON WILKINSON; COURTESY OF PEN & SWORD BOOKS, WWW.PEN-AND-SWORD.COM)



The skeleton of the crashed airship, surrounded by sightseers.

ABOVE: The nose of the airship at the crash site, as seen from one of the lanes nearby. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

Up to this moment they had seen their tracers crossing through the dark night sky only to be frustratingly absorbed into the giant shape of the invader. Hundreds of rounds had pierced the thin envelope fabric, punching ragged little holes in the aluminium framework. Finally, it was seen that a small fire had started in the stern which slowly gained in size.

Captain Robert Saundby, flying an Airco DH2 (A5058), also engaged the Zeppelin and managed to fire two and a half drums at the target. By now a large blaze in the rear section of the airship was apparent. Flames streaked up the sides of the giant airship. Massive sheets of highly-doped envelope fabric were ripped apart in a series of blinding flashes that blasted outwards into the night sky.

As *L.48* fell it was chased by Second Lieutenant Loudon Watkins flying a B.E.12 from 'A' Flight, 37 (Home Defence) Squadron which was based at RFC Goldhanger in Essex. A minute later, as Watkins pulled back the control stick to ascend, he saw the airship pass about 2,000 feet above him. He climbed higher and fired another two drums at a distance of from 2,000 down to 1,000 feet, and then another from 500 feet. It was Watkins who would be credited with the final 'kill' of *L.48*.

Mieth heard *Korvettenkapitän* Schütze, who was in the gondola, shout out that the airship was crashing in flames. Mieth immediately threw off his overcoat, shouting for the others to do the same. He, like all the crew, believed they were over the sea, and would shortly be swimming for their lives and the heavy coats would drag them down.

Five crew members decided to jump, but they all were killed when they impacted the ground in a line south of the main wreckage. One of the remaining fuel tanks also fell from the ship, exploding loudly as it hit the ground, blasting a large crater and shooting flames high into the sky above the village of Theberton. *L.48* followed, landing in the fields of Holly Tree Farm.

The whole of *L.48*'s airframe began to collapse in the middle forming a 'V' shape, whilst large swirling pieces of detached and burning fabric marked its path through the night time Suffolk sky. Eventually the stern crashed into the ground at a 60-degree angle compacting and buckling as it sent up a huge shower of sparks and flaming fabric shreds.

The remaining gas in the bow section was forced out and erupted into a huge fireball. The angle of the impact smashed the rear section of the main gondola. Heavier parts of the airship, such as the engines, were snapped from their mountings and crashed down through the burning superstructure into the soft sandy soil of Holly Tree Farm. The catastrophic descent had taken about seven terrible minutes.

The already bullet-riddled and heat-weakened airframe of *L.48* began to collapse. Rivets were bursting out from joints, sheet metal sections crimping and tearing apart as they were being compressed downwards. The three surviving crewmen, which included Otto Mieth, could only watch as the flames shot upwards and consumed all the envelope fabric from the nose section.

The orange glow of the burning Zeppelin lit up the Suffolk sky, once again visible for many miles. It was also visible to the crew of *L.42*, one of the three other airships which had accompanied *L.48* on the raid that night, who radioed the loss of their sister ship to Germany.

BEI IHREN KAMERADEN ZUR LETZTEN RUHE GEBETTET LIEGEN
HIER DIE BESATZUNGEN VON VIER IM ERSTEN WELTKRIEG ÜBER
ENGLAND ABGESCHOSSENEN ZEPPELINEN VON DEN URSPRÜNGLICHEN
BESTATTUNGSORTEN POTTERS BAR GREAT BURSTEAD UND THEBERTON
WURDEN DIE GEFALLENEN HIERHER ÜBERFÜHRT. DIE TOTEN JEDER
BESATZUNG SIND IN EINER GRABSTÄTTE IN SARKOPHAGEN BEIGESETZT
SIDE BY SIDE WITH THEIR COMRADES THE CREWS OF FOUR
ZEPPELINS SHOT DOWN OVER ENGLAND DURING THE FIRST WORLD
WAR HERE FOUND THEIR ETERNAL RESTING PLACE THE FALLEN WERE
BROUGHT HERE FROM THEIR ORIGINAL BURIAL PLACES AT
POTTERS BAR GREAT BURSTEAD AND THEBERTON THE MEMBERS
OF EACH CREW ARE BURIED IN CASKETS IN ONE GRAVE.

ABOVE: The bodies of the members of *L48*'s crew who were killed in the crash were initially laid out in the field just beneath the towering marrow-shaped superstructure of the airship's nose section. Shortly afterwards, the sixteen men were buried in St Peters Church at Theberton. Then, in the mid 1960s, their remains were exhumed and re-interred at the German war graves cemetery at Cannock Chase in Staffordshire. This memorial stone marks the lasting resting place of these men. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

BELOW: **King George V and the Prince of Wales leaving their car and being greeted by General Julian Byng as they arrive at the Butte de Warlencourt near Le Sars, on 13 July 1917.**
(ALL IMAGES US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

ROYAL VISIT TO WESTERN FRONT

3 JULY 1917

Almost a year to the day since the Battle of the Somme began, the King and Queen arrived in Calais at the start of a royal visit to the Western Front that would last until 14 July 1917.

Two days after the tour ended, *The Times* gave a detailed account of the Royal couple's movements. 'The King,' noted the reporter, 'passed his days chiefly with the fighting men. He explored not merely the old battle grounds of the Somme, at which last year he could look only through his field glasses, but also the newly-won Vimy and Messines Ridges, whence, from among the waste of shell-holes and the uncleaned litter of battlefields, he gazed down upon the enemy's lines. Besides coming in contact with every branch of the British Armies in the field, and conversing with an immense number of the men in each branch and of every grade, the King has been able to meet representatives of our Allies ...

'The King's first whole day at the front was spent with the Army of General Sir Herbert Plumer, which has so recently covered itself with glory, and the first steps which he took on the battlefield were along that dreadful road up to the Messines Ridge and the ruins of Wytschaete, so lately wrung from the enemy. It is still an unpleasant and dangerous place enough to visit. On the day before the King was there the enemy had very heavily shelled the area over which he walked. After he had left later in the same day the process was repeated. But the King was early, being well on his way up the Ridge by half-past 9, and the morning was grey and cloudy with indifferent observation, so that the guns were fairly quiet. None the less, German guns all the while were diligently searching a wood near the King's left known as Square Wood, while there was constant coming and going of aircraft with the bursting of shell fire at them from anti-aircraft guns.

'The King, accompanied by the Prince of Wales, motored across the region of desolation which fringes the battlefield, through ruined villages, where the inhabitants, largely refugees from areas which the Germans have occupied, made pathetic efforts to give him greeting. Such few flags as they could muster fluttered from ruined houses, and little knots of children in the charge of nuns, or small clusters of elderly inhabitants, congregated here and there to cheer the car with the Royal Standard as it slipped by.'

The tour continued, the Royal party heading towards the Messines Ridge, His Majesty wearing a Field Marshal's service uniform and a steel helmet. *The Times* continued its account: 'Leaving his car, the King passed ▸▸

ABOVE: King George V climbs the Butte de Warlencourt. This prehistoric burial mound on the side of the Albert to Bapaume Road marked the very limit of the British advance on the Somme. In 1990, to ensure this symbolic site could be preserved for future generations, and in remembrance of the Battle of the Somme, The Western Front Association took the decision to purchase the Butte.

by the forlorn cross-roads of Vierstraat and walked on up the straight road, still fringed in places by ragged stumps of the trees which once made it a shady avenue, towards the Ridge. He went up by the ground over which the Irishmen had fought on June 7, across the almost unspoiled ribbon of No Man's Land, over the wreckage of what a month before had been the German first-line trench, and up the long brown slope of shell-pitted chaos and litter of war which is the face of the Ridge.

'As they went Sir Herbert Plumer outlined the story of the battle, calling the King's attention to the various landmarks – like the red chateau, the hospice, and the hummocks, which are all that now remain of Wytschaete village and Wytschaete Wood, and the other woods around little places, each one of which has now won its place in history. Among the shell-holes the King stopped now and again to examine some grisly relic of the fighting. There were bits of German uniforms and equipment, broken rifles, unexploded bombs, and such things as part of a pack of cards, with which the Germans had amused themselves, and in a dug-out into which his Majesty went the electric torch revealed the fact that a meal had been left half eaten on the table.

'The King visited the heap which was once the red chateau and walked nearly to the hospice, then skirted the acres of blackened stumps which we still call Wytschaete Wood, and so to the Messines road and the great mine crater at Maedelstede Farm. Thence he went on to the even larger crater at Peckham, with its huge mouth not less than a hundred yards across and its brown depth littered with great masses upheaved by the explosion from the clay layer below. For more than a mile the King walked over the battlefield, and one mile of such walking is more than five miles on a road. On the way he met working parties and talked to them, and spoke with single soldiers who passed, and as he went some more German guns woke up and began rhythmically pounding the poor dust-heaps of Wytschaete itself.'

There was little doubt that the visit had been a triumph, as the same special correspondent noted: 'Nothing has occurred to mar in even the smallest detail the success of the tour. Nothing could have exceeded the enthusiasm and demonstrations of affection with which their Majesties, whether separately or together, have been everywhere greeted.' ●

ABOVE: A British staff officer is pictured wearing German breastplate armour and helmet as he speaks to King George V at Vimy Ridge, 11 July 1917.

LEFT: Instructors explain a trench mortar to King George V and the Prince of Wales at the Trench Warfare School, Helfaut, on 7 July 1917.

RIGHT: A trench mortar bombardment is laid for King George V during his visit to the Gas School at Helfaut on 7 July 1917.

THE VANGUARD EXPLOSION

9 JULY 1917

Launched on 22 February 1909, the St. Vincent-class dreadnought battleship HMS *Vanguard*, the ninth warship to bear the name, had spent most of its wartime service in the Home or Grand fleets, her duties generally consisting of routine patrols and training in the North Sea.

On the morning of 9 July 1917, the Jutland veteran HMS *Vanguard* was anchored on the North Shore of Scapa Flow. As the day wore on, the crew was exercised at 'Abandon Ship' before, at 17.00 hours, she departed from the North Shore. At a speed of twelve knots she proceeded to her berth in the Fleet anchorage, dropping anchor at 18.30 hours.

The evening passed quietly, and there is no record of anyone detecting anything amiss on *Vanguard*. It was at 23.30 hours that tragedy struck and a huge explosion tore through the warship. The subsequent 'Report of the Court of Enquiry' noted that the evidence from witnesses 'of the blowing up of the "VANGUARD" points to the first visible flame coming up from below just abaft the foremast, this being followed, after a short interval, by a heavy explosion accompanied by a very great increase of flame together with a very large quantity of wreckage fragments thrown up abaft the foremast in the vicinity of "P" and "Q" turrets. This explosion was followed after a short interval by a second explosion which considerably increased the volume of flame and smoke (and no doubt debris), but smoke had previously obscured the ship so that the vicinity of this explosion could not be exactly located. The evidence, however, points to it being just abaft the first one.'

Able Seaman Ernest 'Mick' Moroney was onboard HMAS *Melbourne* which was anchored at Scapa at the time. He noted in his diary: 'A terrible detonation took place lighting the whole fleet as if it were daylight ... trawler which was close by got smothered in blood and pieces of human flesh, and afterwards picked up half the body of a marine the only body recovered up to date.'

HMS *Vanguard* sank instantly. The exact cause of the explosions has never been established, though a number of theories have been suggested. The Enquiry did conclude that 'the loss of the "VANGUARD" may have been due to (i) The ignition of cordite, due to an avoidable cause; or (ii) abnormal deterioration of a charge of cordite due to hat charge having, undetected, been subjected to abnormal treatment during its life.' What is known is that of more than 800 men on board at the time, just two survived. Amongst the dead was Commander Kyosuke Eto, a military attaché of the Imperial Japanese Navy who had been assigned as a military observer on board *Vanguard*.

In terms of loss of life, the explosion and sinking of HMS *Vanguard* remains the most catastrophic accidental explosion in the history of the UK, and one of the worst accidental losses of the Royal Navy.

ABOVE: The memorial to the casualties of HMS *Vanguard* that can be seen in the Naval Cemetery at Lyness. (COURTESY OF DES COLHOUN; WWW.GEOGRAPH.ORG.UK)

BELOW: The St. Vincent-class dreadnought battleship HMS *Vanguard*. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

ROYAL NAME CHANGE

17 JULY 1917

At the outbreak of the First World War the monarchies of Britain, Germany and Russia were all held by descendants of Queen Victoria. King George V ruled the United Kingdom as King of the House of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha – this name had come to the British Royal Family in 1840 with the marriage of Queen Victoria to Prince Albert, son of Ernst, Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha.

Even before the outbreak of war in 1914, anti-German sentiment had been mounting throughout Britain, and indeed the whole of the Empire. The situation reached a peak in March 1917 when the Germans deployed the Gotha G.IV heavy bomber on bombing raids against London.

'The King,' declared Harold Macmillan, 'was sensitive to criticism'. He went on to write: 'When in May 1917 he was told that it was whispered that he must be pro-German since he and his family had German names, he started and grew pale. Lord Stamfordham, when appealed to, was forced to admit that many members of the Royal Family did in fact bear names of Teutonic origin ...

'The King decided that some new name must be adopted. Several alternatives were considered. The Duke of Connaught suggested "Tudor-Stewart"; both Lord Rosebery and Mr Asquith felt that such a name might have inauspicious associations. The names "Plantagenet", "York", "England", "Lancaster", "D'Este" and "Fitzroy" were all in their turn considered and rejected. Finally Lord Stamfordham, having discovered that at one time Edward III had been called "Edward of Windsor", suggested this natural English name. It was immediately welcomed.'

On 17 July 1917, a Council was held at Buckingham Palace, the result of which was the publication of a royal proclamation. In this the following was stated:

'Now, therefore, We, out of Our Royal Will and Authority, do hereby declare and announce that as from the date of this Our Royal Proclamation Our House and Family shall be styled and known as the House and Family of Windsor, and that all the descendants in the male line of Our said Grandmother Queen Victoria who are subjects of these Realms, other than female descendants who may marry or may have married, shall bear the said Name of Windsor.'

The Times noted that 'throughout the Dominions of the Crown it will be felt that the King could not have chosen a more appropriate name for his Royal House than that of Windsor, which is *par excellence* the seat of the Sovereign, and has been associated longer than any other Royal residence with the fortunes and the lives of the Kings and Queens of England. Windsor Castle certainly dates back to William the Conqueror ... All the successive Royal Houses have been connected with Windsor, some more closely than others.'

The King also took the decision of suspending or revoking the British peerages and titles of his relatives who were fighting on the German side. By anglicising the Royal household and other notable estates and titles, King George V permanently changed the appearance of the monarchy in a move that endures to this day.

ABOVE LEFT: The King undertaking one of his official duties – in this case visiting the munitions factory operated by Holmes & Co. Ltd. In Hull. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

RIGHT: Entitled *A Good Riddance*, this cartoon depicting King George V sweeping away the German titles was originally published by *Punch*.

TANK CORPS FORMED

28 JULY 1917

Tanks had first made their appearance on the battlefield at the Battle of the Somme in September 1916. Though suffering many defects and proving to be very unreliable, tanks had, by the middle of 1917, become an essential support for infantry attacks. As the number of tank battalions increased it became apparent that they needed to be organised into a separate corps.

The tank battalions had started service as companies in what was called the Heavy Branch of the Machine Gun Corps. Each company consisted of four sections of three tanks, with one spare machine. As more machines rolled off the production lines the original eight companies were each expanded to battalions, being identified by letters A through to H. On 28 July 1917, the Heavy Branch was separated from the rest of the Machine Gun Corps by Royal Warrant and given official status as the Tank Corps. The first commander of the Tank Corps was

Though still using letters to identify the individual battalions, later the corps was expanded with the introduction of seven more battalions, all of which then changed from letters to numbers, 1 to 15. A battalion comprised three companies.

The new Corps' baptism of fire was in the Third Battle of Ypres. The problems and difficulties the tanks encountered were related by Corporal A.E. Lee of what was still 'A' Battalion, as his tank attacked towards Surbiton Villas beyond Hooge: 'When we got to the furthest point of this little valley, one of our tracks broke through the soft ground and we went down into a deep hole. It was impossible to move the tank because she was lurched right over on to her side, one gun pointing to the earth and the other pointing to the sky. We were completely helpless.'

Private J.L. Addy of 'D' Company described just what it was like for the tank crews (which consisted of a subaltern, three drivers and four gunners) in battle: 'When you're enclosed in a tank and there's so much racket, you don't know whether its shells that's hitting you or what you're doing. The noise of the engine was tremendous, and we had to stand by with a pyrene fire-extinguisher and get ready to shoot it at the engine if it got too hot, because we had twenty gallons of petrol on either side of the tank and all round the sides were racks of ammunition.'

The boggy and shell-cratered ground over which the Battle of Passchendaele was fought was not suitable for tank action, with machine after machine becoming stranded in the mud, where they were inviting targets for the German artillery. Morale amongst the tank crews weakened, and throughout the Army confidence in the effectiveness of the tanks in battle slipped. It was an inauspicious beginning for the Tank Corps.

ABOVE: One of the many tanks lost on the Western Front is broken up and removed by Royal Engineers.

ABOVE: Almost certainly photographed during a demonstration, a tank makes its way through a smoke screen. (BOTH HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

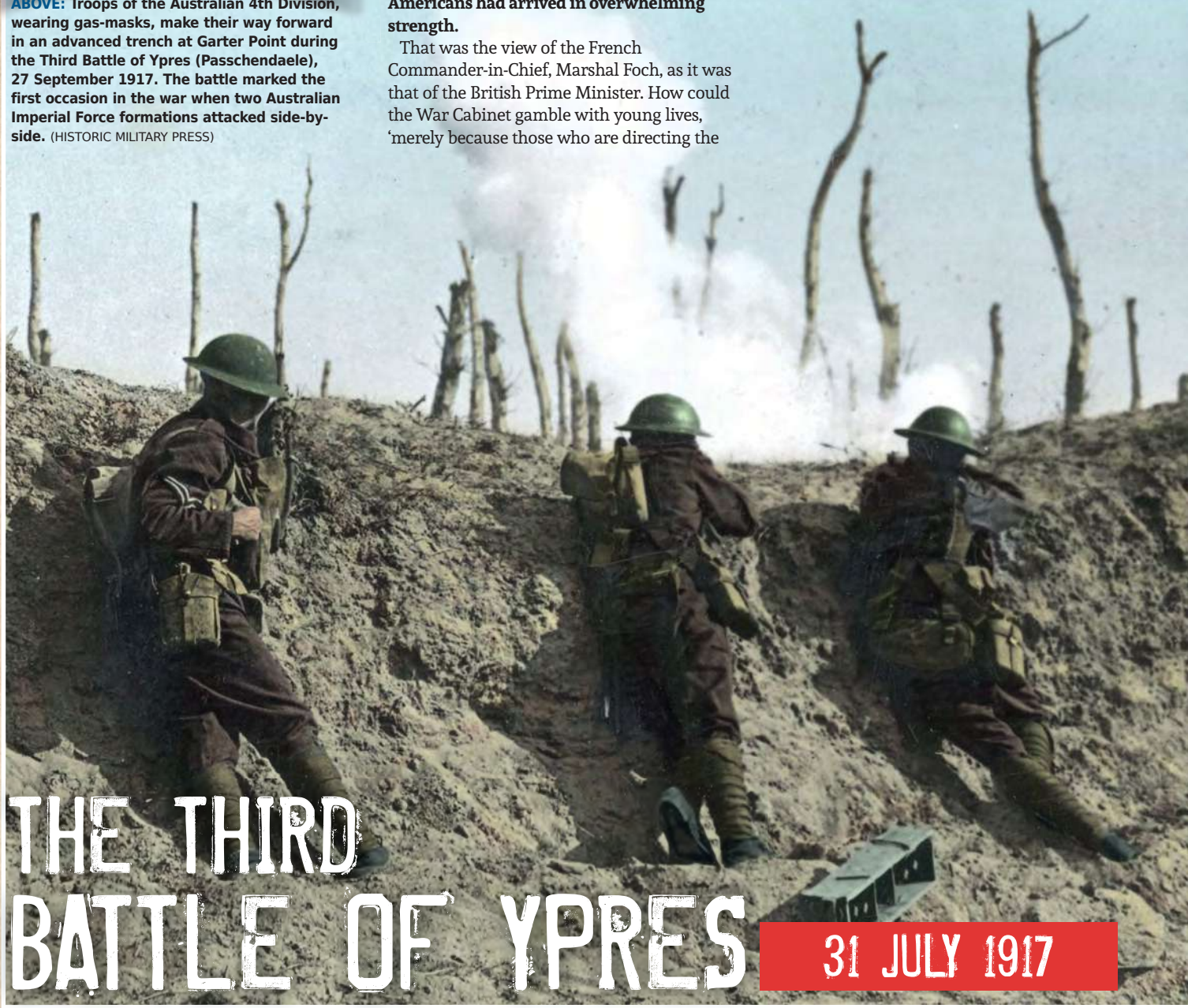
ABOVE: Troops of the Australian 4th Division, wearing gas-masks, make their way forward in an advanced trench at Garter Point during the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele), 27 September 1917. The battle marked the first occasion in the war when two Australian Imperial Force formations attacked side-by-side. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

There was no respite. The Germans were demoralised and exhausted after suffering a catastrophic defeat at Messines, and the British artillery continued to hammer at the German positions to the south and east of Ypres. Haig, with his insistence on continual offensive action, believed that the Allies should persist with their constant attacks, which would eventually bleed dry the German Army and compel the Kaiser to surrender. Haig may have been correct, but the cost in human – British and Commonwealth – lives was enormous. The successful capture of the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge, great though that victory was, resulted in almost 25,000 casualties in just two weeks. With the Germans heading for certain defeat and the imminent arrival of the divisions of the United States Army, it seemed to many that there should be no more grand assaults upon the strongly-fortified German positions, no more wasted lives; at least not until the Americans had arrived in overwhelming strength.

That was the view of the French Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Foch, as it was that of the British Prime Minister. How could the War Cabinet gamble with young lives, 'merely because those who are directing the war can think of nothing better to do with the men under their command?', complained Lloyd George.

Haig, though, was not to be deterred, still seeking the great breakthrough that had nurtured his dreams since 1915. The enormous UK war machine that had grown slowly over the earlier years had now reached a self-propelling momentum. It seemed almost to have created an economy of its own; consumption created demand which generated supply, and the more shells and bullets that were sent to the Front, the more the Army threw at the enemy. Supply and demand, the economics of war – a war that had become unstoppable, as had Haig's ambition.

He told generals Gough and Plumer, therefore, to prepare for the Third Battle of Ypres. Fought around the little Belgium village of Passchendaele, the battle would come to epitomise not just the futility of offensive tactics against well-prepared defences, but of



THE THIRD BATTLE OF YPRES

31 JULY 1917

ABOVE: Three Irish Guards, wearing German body-armour and pictured examining a captured enemy machine-gun, at Pilckem on 31 July 1917. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

BELOW LEFT: British troops, states the original caption, in the front line during the early stages of the Battle of Passchendaele, also known as the Third Battle of Ypres. The offensive was presaged by a powerful artillery bombardment. Such was the strength of the shelling, that one German staff officer, General von Kuhl, would later write: 'A hurricane of fire, completely beyond anyone's experience, broke out ... This was not just drum fire; it was as though Hell itself had slipped its bonds. What were the terrors of Verdun and the Somme compared to this grotesquely huge outpouring of raw power?' (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

the terrible conditions the men had to endure in the Flanders mud, the images of which are forever synonymous with the trench warfare of the First World War.

The date for Haig's next terrible attack was 25 July 1917. The objective of this offensive was to disrupt the German rail system which supplied their front line troops. The first stage of this was the capture of Passchendaele which lay on a ridge just five miles from a railway junction at Roulers, which was vital to the supply system of the German 4th Army. The front of the Allied attack extended from the Lys River opposite Dettlemont northwards to beyond Steenstraatt, a distance of over fifteen miles, but the main blow was to be delivered by Hubert Gough's Fifth Army on a front of about seven and a half miles.

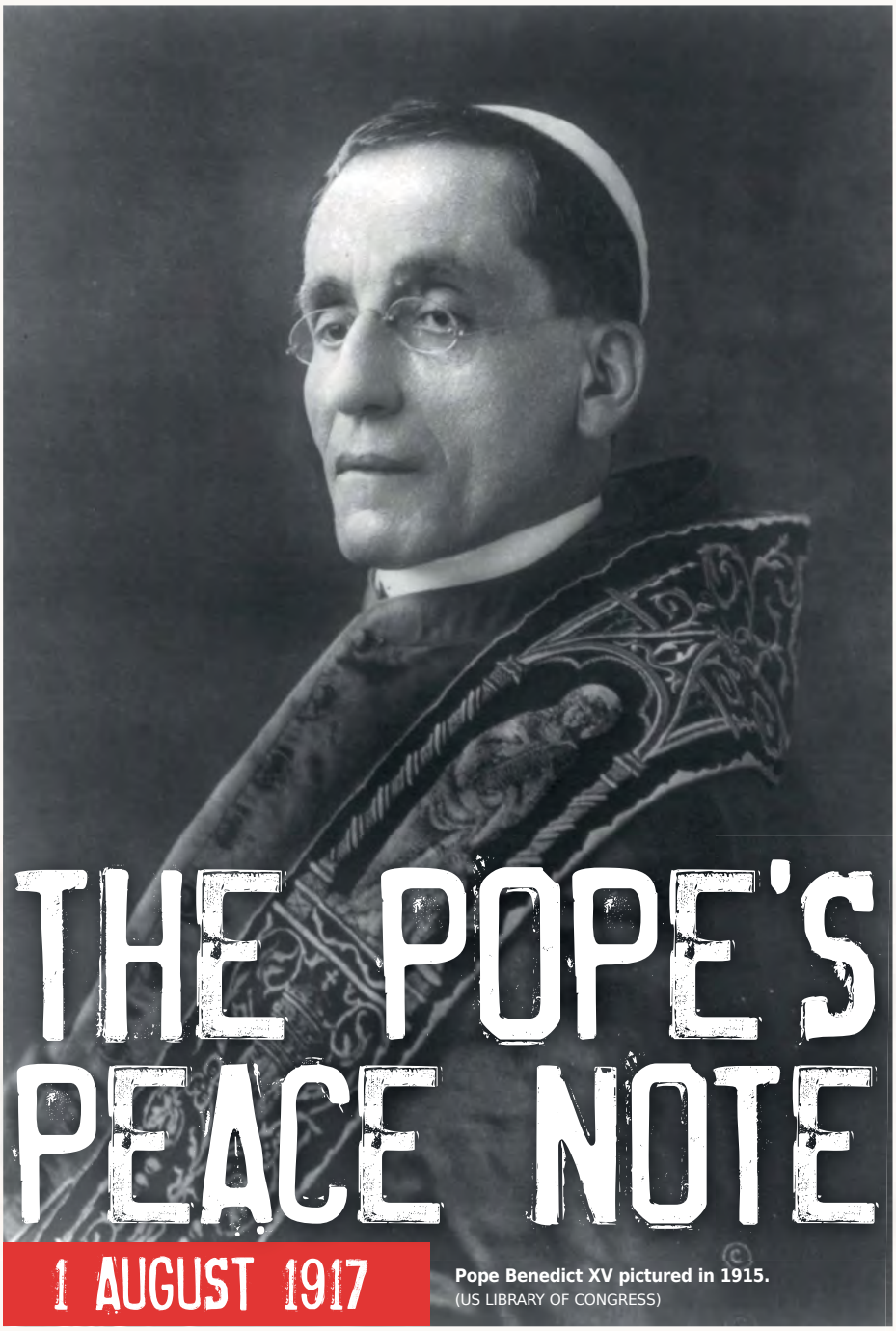
Poor weather conditions, plus a realisation that the German artillery, which had suffered considerably from British counter-battery fire, had been withdrawn beyond the range of the Royal Artillery, caused Haig to delay the opening of the battle until 31 July. Though August was expected to be a relatively dry month, the poor weather in July was a harbinger of what was to come.

It was still dark when, at 03.50 hours, three British and one French corps delivered the first attack, concentrating on the capture of the German positions on Pilckem Ridge. Moving behind a creeping barrage, Lieutenant J. Annan was with the 1st/9th Royal Scots of the 51st (Highland) Division. This formed part of the second wave, following behind a battalion of the Gordon Highlanders, who took the fortified German strongpoint of Minty's Farm. Annan later recalled: 'They [the Gordons] took it with the bayonet, like wild things, and when we got to it the dead were lying all around. Germans, grey against the mud, all mixed up with the dead Gordons lying there in their kilts ... As we were struggling up to it one of the boys got hit with a huge shell fragment. It sliced him straight in two. He dropped his rifle and bayonet and threw his arms up in the air, and the top part of his torso fell back on the ground. The unbelievable thing was that the legs and the kilt went on running.'

There were other successes along the line, and rumours reached the rear areas of significant breakthroughs. Haig, who despite all the previous evidence to the contrary still clung to the belief that the cavalry would be the weapon that would turn a small gap in the enemy's defences into major enveloping manoeuvre that would roll up the German line, encouraged the cavalry to move up to take advantage of the reported successes. However, those early achievements soon were found to be illusory. The German front line was nothing more than a series of interconnected outposts. Behind these were the real defences. Concealed by the folds of the ridges was a veritable fortress. Consisting of large shelters with walls and roofs many feet thick, where the troops could shelter in safety, and groups of strongpoints bristling with machine-guns, plus well camouflaged pill-boxes and carefully positioned dug-outs, the Germans considered their defences all-but impregnable. Despite all the meticulous planning and the extensive aerial observations of the RFC, the extent and strength of defences had not been appreciated. It was clear the battle was going to be far costlier than had been thought.

In fact, the first stage of the main part of the Third Battle of Ypres, the capture of Pilckem Ridge, was to last a further three days. It cost the Allies more than 31,000 men. Incredibly, Haig declared that these figures were very light for such a big battle.

ABOVE: As the first day of the Battle of Pilckem Ridge unfolds, men of the 11th Battalion Durham Light Infantry are pictured being taken forward by light railway passing Elverdinghe, 31 July 1917. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)



THE POPE'S PEACE NOTE

1 AUGUST 1917

Pope Benedict XV pictured in 1915. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

The First World War was only weeks old when, on 3 September 1914, the College of Cardinals selected Giacomo Paolo Giovanni Battista della Chiesa to become the next Pope. Somewhat unsurprisingly, the conflict largely overshadowed Pope Benedict XV's pontificate, leading him to declare that it was 'the suicide of civilized Europe'.

Pope Benedict immediately declared the neutrality of the Holy See. It was from this perspective that he attempted to mediate peace.

On 1 August 1917, Pope Benedict issued a seven-point peace plan. It began with the following statement: 'From the beginning of Our Pontificate, amidst the horrors of the terrible war unleashed upon Europe, We have kept before Our attention three things above all: to preserve complete impartiality in relation to all the belligerents, as is appropriate to him who is the common father and who loves all his children with equal affection; to endeavor constantly to do all the most possible good, without personal exceptions and without national or religious distinctions, a duty which the universal law of charity, as well as the supreme spiritual charge entrusted to Us by Christ, dictates to Us; finally, as Our peacemaking mission equally demands, to leave nothing undone within Our power, which could assist in hastening the end of this calamity, by trying to lead the peoples and their heads to more moderate frames of mind and to the calm deliberations of peace, of a "just and lasting" peace.'

In summary, the plan stated that (1) 'the moral force of right ... be substituted for the material force of arms'; (2) there must be 'simultaneous and reciprocal diminution of armaments'; (3) a mechanism for 'international arbitration' must be established'; (4) 'true liberty and common rights over the sea' should exist; (5) there should be a 'renunciation of war indemnities'; (6) occupied territories should be evacuated; and (7) there should be 'an examination ... of rival claims'.

In the UK the Pope's peace plan was delivered to the King by the Cardinal Secretary of State, Cardinal Gasparri. It was accompanied by a letter asking the King to forward to the governments of France, Italy and the United States, the 'concrete proposals of peace sponsored by the Pope in his anxiety to do all that he can do to secure an end to the conflict which has for more than three years devastated the civilised world'. In the reply it was stated that 'His Majesty the King has received the proposals with the most sincere appreciation of the lofty and benevolent intentions which animated His Holiness and His Majesty's Government will study them with the closest and most serious attention'.

In the end the Pope's peace plan was, by agreement between the Allies, politely answered by referring His Holiness to the statement of peace terms sent to President Wilson in January 1917. The war, meanwhile, raged on.

ABOVE: Pope Benedict XV's envoy in Germany, Eugenio Pacelli (on the right), pictured in front of the Imperial German Headquarters after an audience with the Kaiser during which he delivered the peace plan.

FIRST LANDING ON A MOVING SHIP

2 AUGUST 1917

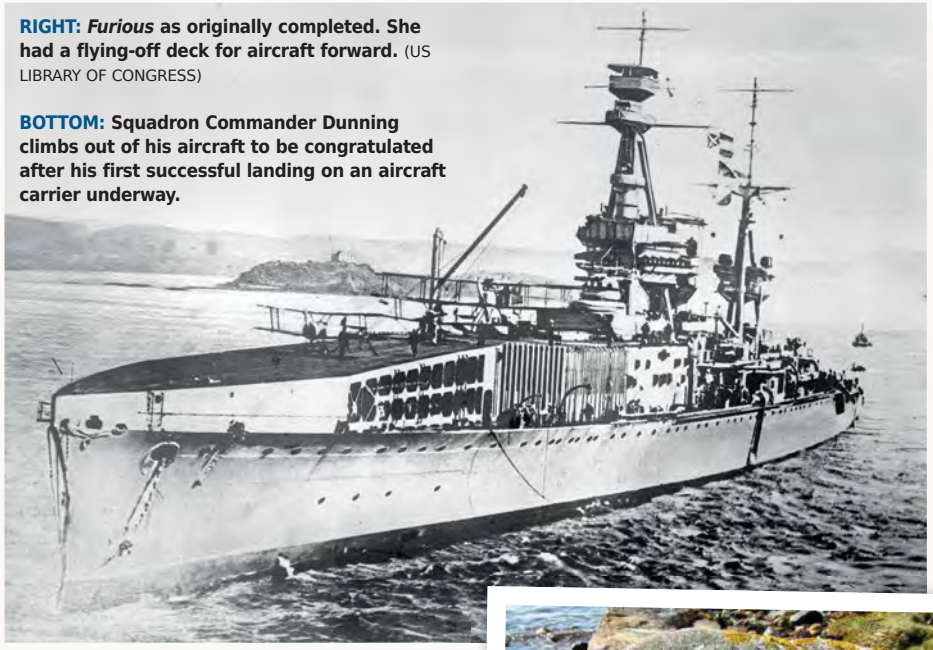
A pioneering moment in naval aviation occurred on 2 August 1917, when a Royal Naval Air Service Sopwith Pup piloted by Squadron Commander Edwin Harris Dunning became the first aircraft to land on a moving ship at sea.

The warship involved was the modified Courageous-class battlecruiser HMS *Furious*, which had been converted into an early aircraft carrier during construction. At the time of Dunning's ground breaking landing, believed to have involved the Pup serial number N6453, HMS *Furious* had been travelling at twenty-six knots in Scapa Flow, Orkney.

Five days later, Dunning made another successful landing in the same manner. A third attempt later that same day, in Pup N6452, ended in disaster. Dunning's approach was too high and he hit the deck too far forward. With not enough room to stop, he waved away the landing party and tried to take off again. The Pup's engine stalled as Dunning attempted to pull up. The aircraft went over the side of the ship. Dunning was knocked unconscious as the Pup entered the water and he drowned in his aircraft.

Edwin Dunning had been born in 1892. His father, Sir Edwin Dunning, had been Mayor of Tiverton, Devon and later moved to Essex. He had strong business connections in South Africa and that was where the younger Edwin was born. He attended the Royal Naval Colleges at Osborne and Dartmouth and went on to earn the DSC, gazetted on 14 March 1916, the citation noting his exceptionally good work as a seaplane flyer, 'making many long flights both for spotting and photographing'.

After his fatal crash, Dunning's body was recovered and he was buried in the churchyard of St Lawrence at Bradfield, Essex. A plaque in the church contains a message from the Admiralty which states: 'The Admiralty wish you to know what great service he performed for the Navy. It was in fact a demonstration of landing an aeroplane on the deck of a Man-of-War whilst the latter was under way. This had never been done before; and the data obtained was of the utmost value. It will make aeroplanes indispensable to a fleet and possibly, revolutionise Naval Warfare. The risk taken by Squadron Commander Dunning needed much courage. He had already made two successful landings, but expressed a wish to land again himself, before other Pilots did so, and in this last run he was killed. My Lords desire to place on record their sense of the loss to the Naval Service of this gallant Officer.' ●



RIGHT: *Furious* as originally completed. She had a flying-off deck for aircraft forward. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

BOTTOM: Squadron Commander Dunning climbs out of his aircraft to be congratulated after his first successful landing on an aircraft carrier underway.

ABOVE: The weathered memorial stone commemorating Squadron Commander E.H. Dunning DSC which can be seen overlooking the spot where he died. It is located at the landward end of Smoogro Jetty, Orkney. (COURTESY OF DEREK MAYES; WWW.GEOGRAPH.ORG.UK)

US TROOPS PARADE IN LONDON

The morning of Wednesday, 15 August 1917, marked the occasion when American troops paraded through the streets of London for the first time.

The US troops involved had arrived in the British capital by train, making their way from Waterloo Station to Wellington Barracks in Birdcage Walk to complete their final preparations. It was at Waterloo, noted one reporter, that the visitors received their 'first noisy welcome. 'At the railway station there were some hundreds of British soldiers going on leave and a few score coming back from France ... The Tommies cheered in British fashion, and the Americans, standing easy, responded with the sort of cheer that one hears from the Big League crowds.'

A large crowd had soon gathered at Wellington Barracks. 'The railings of the parade ground were packed with people eager to make the men from the United States feel at home, and incidentally to beg a souvenir or two from them in the shape of a button or a badge. At 11.30 a.m. the troops left the barracks to the tune of "The Boston Tea Party," surely a strange air to be played before troops in the streets of London, but still a most appropriate one.

'The men were admired all along the route. They were a remarkably uniform lot, and their physique was splendid. All of them are volunteers ... Americans wear the hat that has been made familiar to us by the New Zealand forces – a felt hat with a straight brim and pinched crown. Each unit of the American Army wears a different cord round the crown, with two tassels hanging on the brim in front. The men carried waterproof capes slung in their belts behind. Instead of puttees they wore canvas leggings laced in front ... The sergeants, many of them with medal ribbons telling of their service in Mexico, the Philippines, or China, all wore automatic pistols hung handily on the right hip.'

As the long column of American servicemen marched on, it headed up Whitehall, passed Nelson's Column, into Pall Mall and then up into Piccadilly. As each company passed the American Embassy it came to the salute for the Ambassador. 'Canadians at the Maple Leaf Club cheered hard and continuously as the procession swung past the Embassy,' noted *The Times*. 'Perhaps the crowd was thickest and most enthusiastic round Buckingham Palace, where the King, Queen Alexandra, Lord French and Lieutenant-General Sir Francis Lloyd stood at the saluting base in front of the massed bands of the Guards Brigade. As the salute was [again] given by each company in turn, the King acknowledged it, and the crowd burst into prolonged cheering.'

ABOVE: American soldiers marching near Buckingham Palace during the parade. In the background is the Queen Victoria Memorial. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

15 AUGUST 1917

BELOW: The parade underway on 15 August 1917. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

THE FIGHT FOR LANGEMARCK

16 AUGUST 1917

It was destined to be the wettest August in living memory and the Flanders fields soon turned to the infamous Flanders mud. The start of the month had given a brief indication of how quickly the ground around Ypres could become waterlogged, but for the following ten days the weather remained fine and, even though the fields were still sodden, after the capture of the Pilckem Ridge preparations went ahead for the assault upon the next severe obstacle, Langemarck village.

As the date for Zero Hour approached the weather broke – and it poured down. The attack was delayed for a further two days, but the view was that war could not be stopped because of a little rain and so on 16 August the assault began.

In front of Langemarck was a 'tiny' rivulet called the Steenbeek. By the morning of the 16th, this had broken its banks, the water spilling onto the already flooded ground. It was obvious that the troops, stumbling across the swampy ground before then tackling the Steenbeek, would be easy targets for the enemy. So small bodies were sent across the river to lay out duckboards and cut the German wire in advance of the main attack.

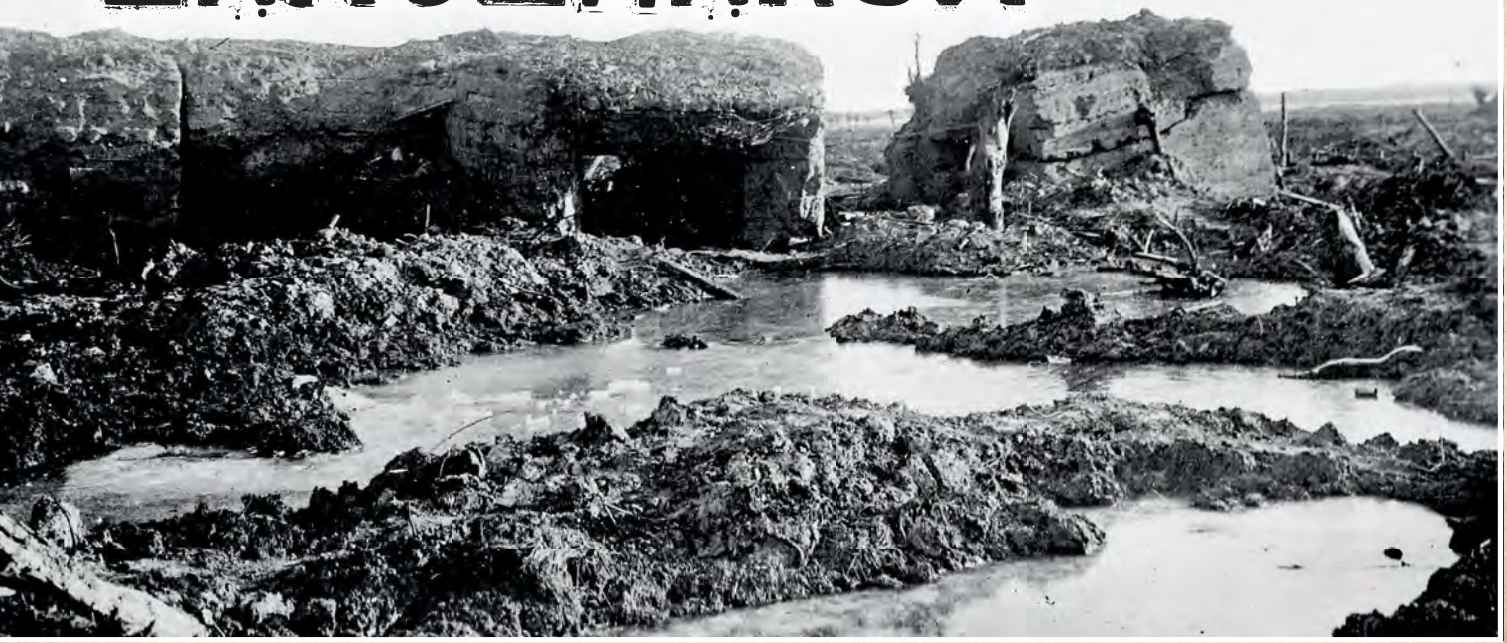
At 04.45 hours a creeping barrage began and the British troops advanced. Behind came the rest of the attacking force, which included 11 Platoon of the 6th Battalion, Yorkshire Regiment, led by Captain A. Goring MC: 'Well, the first thing that happened was that I lost my platoon. I waded across, got through the gap in the wire, turned round and there was nobody there ... What had happened was that they had started to cross the swamp and ... there was a bit of flooded ground about three feet wide. Well, I'd hopped it, but of course my platoon went straight into it.'

British troops at Boesinghe, near Langemarck, on 18 August 1917. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

The Queen's Westminster Rifles were to take Glencorse Wood and then Polygon Wood. With the QWR was Rifleman E.E. Winterbourne: 'Beyond the trench it was soft going, but it seemed to be perfectly good ground ... All of a sudden I put one foot down and the next moment I was through the earth and in a bog up to my armpits.'

Despite these difficulties, Haig later wrote the following in respect of the fighting on 16 August: 'In spite of [the] partial check on the southern portion of our attack, the day closed as a decided success for the Allies. A wide gap had been made in the old German third line system, and over 2,100 prisoners and some thirty guns had been captured.'

By the end of the battle two days later, despite the fact that the Allied attack had succeeded in the north from Langemarck to Drie Grachten, the fighting had slithered to a halt, both sides hampered by the conditions. General Gough could see no point in continuing the offensive and he strove to call a halt to the bloody, muddy slaughter. Haig, though, was undeterred.



BELOW: Ceaseless rain and shellfire had also destroyed most of the natural drainage system on the Passchendaele battlefield – as this view of battered German blockhouses reveals. (LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA)

Lieutenant General Jan C. Smuts. (BOTH US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

Smuts also wrote: 'Essentially the position of an Air service is quite different from that of an artillery arm ... artillery could never be used in war except as a weapon in military or naval or air operations. It is a weapon, an instrument ancillary to a service, but could not be an independent service itself. Air service on the contrary can be used as an independent means of war operations. Nobody that witnessed the attack on London on 11th July could have any doubt on that point. Unlike artillery an air fleet can conduct extensive operations far from, and independently of, both Army and Navy. As far as can at present be foreseen there is absolutely no limit to the scale of its future independent war use. And the day may not be far off when aerial operations with their devastation of enemy lands and destruction of industrial and populous centres on a vast scale may become the principal operations of war, to which the older forms of military and naval operations may become secondary and subordinate.'

Amongst his final conclusions, Smuts noted that 'It is important for the winning of the war that we should not only secure air predominance, but secure it on a very large scale; and having secured it in this war we should make every effort and sacrifice to maintain it for the future. Air supremacy may in the long run become as important a factor in the defence of the Empire as sea supremacy.' Through his work, Smuts had laid the foundations for the creation of the RAF – the world's first independent air force.

THE SMUTS REPORT

17 AUGUST 1917

With German air raids on Britain continuing, it was felt that the subject of the nation's aerial defence should be thoroughly scrutinized. On 11 July 1917 the decision was taken to establish a Cabinet Committee to consider air organisation and air defence. Although nominally under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, in practice the task fell to Lieutenant General Jan C. Smuts.

The South African immediately set about his task. Just eight days later, on 19 July, he released an interim report. Eventually, there were in fact two documents rather dryly entitled 'The 1st and 2nd Reports of the Prime Minister's Committee on Air Organization and Home Defence against Air Raids'. Together the pair have come to be referred to as the 'Smuts Report', the full version of which was presented to the War Cabinet on 17 August 1917.

RIGHT: One of those seconded to Smuts was General Sir David Henderson. Henderson had been at the forefront of the RFC since its inception. As the first Director-General of Military Aeronautics in 1913-14 he had acquired unparalleled knowledge of the corporate history of military aviation in the UK. He had added to that a thorough knowledge of the tactical application of Air Power, acquired while leading the RFC in France for the first three years of the First World War.

Many of the points Smuts raised are as valid today as they were then. Amongst the Committee's recommendations, for example, was the establishment of a London Air Defence Area, to encompass all of the United Kingdom within Gotha bomber range, and the acceleration of plans to form additional day-fighter squadrons for home defence. Smuts also promoted the creation of an Air Ministry 'to control and administer all matters in connection with air warfare of every kind and that the new ministry should proceed to work out the arrangements for the amalgamation of the two [Air] services and for the legal constitution and discipline of the new Service'.

THE LAST DAYLIGHT RAID

When they struck on 22 August 1917, the German raiders did not reach far inland, targeting instead the Kent port of Ramsgate. Twenty-eight bombs were dropped by ten Gothas within a square mile of the High Street. One 50kg bomb fell in Military Road, next to the harbour, and struck a store where people were sheltering from the attack, killing six men and a child. The deaths of Canadian soldiers elsewhere in the town, took the death toll to nine, later mounting to twelve.

Five aircraft from RFC Manston, three from Eastchurch, six from Walmer and two from Dover were in the sky to intercept the intruders. They attacked the Gothas over Thanet, and afterwards pursued them down the coast to Dover.

One of the pilots who took off from Walmer was Flight Commander C.T. MacLaren, who was at the controls of Sopwith Scout N6438. In his subsequent report he noted that he had taken-off 'at 11.5 a.m. B.S.T. in pursuit of seven Gothas observed two miles north of Walmer at about 10,000 feet; chased these to Dover and 10 miles seawards but could make no impression on them so observing signal previously at Dover proceeded towards Kentish Knock Light Vessel, but nothing seen there. Returned and landed at 12.0 p.m. B.S.T. Did not observe any damage in neighbourhood of this Aerodrome.'

Flight Lieutenant H.F. Kerbey also scrambled from Walmer: 'On receipt of hostile aircraft signal went off climbing in direction of Manston. Observed ten "Gotha" machines at about 11,000 feet approaching Broadstairs. In company with five "Camels" kept on climbing. Gothas now turned in direction of Stoner under heavy and very accurate A.A.

'Camels had now outdistanced and outclimbed me; observed two Camels attacking one of the leading Gothas, which immediately burst into flames. Another Camel and myself were now in a favourable position for attack on the right-hand Gotha. I closed and attacked from slightly below and on his quarter. Observed my "tracers" going into fuselage and Gotha practically at once went into a steep spinning nose-dive. I kept following it down getting in an occasional burst until Gotha finally fell into sea about quarter of a mile off the beach near Margate. My engine was oiled up and would not pick up and so I had to land on the beach at Margate.'

Two Gothas were shot down by anti-aircraft fire whilst a third was brought down by Flight Sub-Lieutenant J. Drake of the Royal Naval Air Service. Such was the growing efficiency of the British defences, and the resulting punishment they received for their incursion over Kent, the German raiders would never again target Britain in daylight, confining their efforts instead to the hours of darkness.

BELOW: A contemporary painting of a Gotha crashing at Thanet during the raid on 22 August 1917. (COURTESY OF TIM LYNCH)

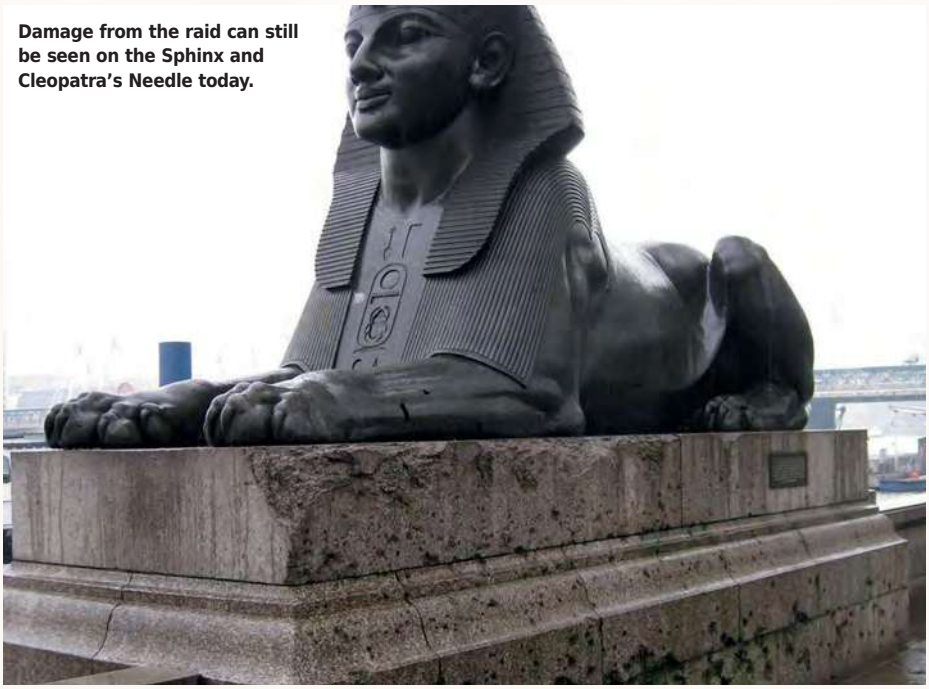
BOTTOM LEFT: The wreckage of a Gotha being examined 'somewhere in the UK'. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

22 AUGUST 1917

The aftermath of the bomb that exploded on the edge of the pavement near Cleopatra's Needle on the Thames Embankment on the night of 4-5 September 1917. (BOTH HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

4 SEPTEMBER 1917

THE FIRST NIGHT BLITZ ON LONDON



Damage from the raid can still be seen on the Sphinx and Cleopatra's Needle today.

The repeated raids upon London by airships and aircraft had been met by an increased efficiency in the capital's defence. Heavy losses, just as in the Second World War, forced the Germans to switch from daylight to night time bombing. After a period of intensive training, by the beginning of September the Gotha pilots were ready. Their first attack was delivered on the night of 3/4 September. On this preliminary raid the Kentish coastal towns of Margate, Sheerness and Chatham were attacked by four Gothas, the worst consequence of which was that 138 naval ratings were killed in the drill hall of the naval barracks at Chatham.

Following this successful sortie, it was the turn of London next. At 20.30 hours on 4 September, the first of eleven Gothas took to the air and headed for the British capital. Two of the German bombers suffered mechanical problems and had to turn back, but the others continued, flying singularly to reduce the risk of collisions in the dark.

After making landfall, the bombers flew across Kent, with the anti-aircraft guns at Borstal near Rochester claiming one of the Gothas at an estimated height of 13,000 feet. The machine was seen to fall perpendicularly, but as no wreckage was found, it was presumed that it had crashed into the Medway or the Thames.

Of the remaining eight Gothas, only five actually reached London. The first to release its bombs did so over West Ham and Stratford at around 23.25 hours, whilst a second Gotha dropped its load between Greenwich Park and Woolwich twenty minutes later. A third machine reached Oxford Circus where it dropped a 50kg bomb, with another landing near the Strand. A third bomb hit the front of a hotel opposite Charing Cross Hospital. After recovering from the shock of the blast an off-duty RFC officer rushed into the building to see if he could offer any assistance. There he saw two Canadian soldiers sitting dead in their chairs: 'One had been killed by a piece of the bomb,' he later recalled, 'which went through the back of his head and out of the front of his Army hat, taking the cap badge with it'.

The raid continued with bombs landing in Victoria Embankment Gardens and another on the Embankment itself, narrowly missing Cleopatra's Needle just as a tram was passing. The driver and two passengers were killed.

The fifth Gotha began dropping its bombs on Wanstead just before midnight, followed by others exploding in Tottenham, Hornsey, Crouch End and Upper Holloway. One bomb landed in Highgate and another two exploded in Kentish Town, killing a mother and child and a soldier on leave. Before the Gothas flew home another woman was killed near today's Sussex Gardens.

Taken by surprise, none of the RFC squadrons were able to intercept these night-time raiders.

THE BATTLE OF MENIN ROAD

BOTTOM: Casualties resting beside the Menin Road, looking towards Birr Cross Roads, on the morning of 20 September 1917. The wounded on the stretchers are waiting to be taken to the clearing stations; others who are able to walk are making their way west along the road as far as possible towards Ypres itself. Shortly after the photograph was taken a shell fell at this spot, killing most of the wounded on the stretchers. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

20 SEPTEMBER 1917

As the Third Battle of Ypres raged it often resulted in a number of smaller battles, though there had been a pause in Allied general attacks between late August and 20 September. The fighting at Langemarck (16 to 18 August) and Menin Road Ridge (20 to 26 September) were amongst the first of these smaller battles.

The plan for the latter of these, the Battle of Menin Road Ridge, placed more emphasis on the use of heavy and medium artillery. Indeed, some 575 heavy and medium and 720 field guns and howitzers were allocated to the offensive; this was equivalent to almost one artillery piece for every ten yards of the attack front. Following the intense artillery barrage, the Allies attacked on a 14,500 yard front early on 20 September, capturing most their objectives to a depth of about 1,500 yards by mid-morning. The battle marked the first occasion in the war when two AIF formations, the 1st and 2nd Australian divisions, attacked side by side (they were in the centre of an assault by eleven British divisions along Westhoek Ridge facing Glencorse Wood).

The Australians advanced at 05.40 hours. Moving in two bounds, with a one-hour and a two-hour pause in between, they covered the 1,500 yards to their final objective and were able to secure this with minimal interference from the enemy. This was an example of the so-called 'bite and hold' tactics which entailed a short advance by infantry on to enemy positions behind a heavy artillery barrage that was, in turn, followed by consolidation on the position under cover of a deep artillery barrage that would prevent or destroy the customary German counterattacks.

The majority of the offensive's objectives were captured on the first day of the attack; only the 41st Division needed to follow up on the following day. German counter-attacks were repulsed on the first and second days of the offensive. Three quiet days followed, during which time the 23rd and 41st divisions were relieved. The battle ended with a final German counter-attack on 25 September, again repulsed without serious problems.

Charles Bean, the Australian official historian, wrote that the Battle of the Menin Road, 'like those that succeeded it, is easily described inasmuch as it went almost precisely in accordance with plan. The advancing barrage won the ground; the infantry merely occupied it, pouncing on any points at which resistance survived. Whereas the artillery was generally spoken of as supporting the infantry, in this battle the infantry were little more than a necessary adjunct to the artillery's effort.'

Whilst this battle proved the worth of step-by-step tactics, the two AIF divisions still sustained 5,013 casualties. For the British losses, the Official Historian quotes a figure of 20,255, with 3,148 being killed.

BROODSEINDE RIDGE

4 OCTOBER 1917

LEFT: Soldiers work to rescue a horse which been blown into a ditch by an exploding shell near Reutel in Flanders during the Battle of Broodseinde on 4 October 1917. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

BELOW: A regimental aid post of the Australian 3rd Division on Broodseinde Ridge, with a number of wounded waiting for stretcher bearers to carry them back to the dressing station. (COURTESY OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL; E00967)

There had been little to celebrate amidst the mud and the misery of the fighting outside Ypres since the start of the Battle of Passchendaele at the end July. After the rains of August, September had brought a spell of drier weather. On 2 October, the rain returned. It did not stop Haig ordering the completion of the capture of the Gheluvelt plateau, part of which had already fallen to the Allies, by taking the Broodseinde (also known as Broodseynde) Ridge. Generals Gough and Plummer felt that an attack in early October was premature. But, as before, their views were dismissed. The attack was ordered for 4 October, rain or no rain.

W.J. Harvey was with the 24th Battalion, Australian Imperial Force, waiting for Zero Hour under an intense artillery fire: 'They [the Germans] pounded our position with high explosives, including minenwerfers and eight-inch shells, and we had tremendous casualties. It was the heaviest shell-fire the battalion had ever encountered on the jumping-off line ... We had forty killed, including two of our platoon officers, and taking into account the wounded a third of our men were put out of action. Everyone kept their nerve, although it was a terrible strain to lie there under that sort of fire.'

At last the Australians were left of their leash and they stormed forward, the wind-driven rain lashing their backs. Roused almost into a frenzy at having to remain stationery as the German artillery crashed amongst them, the Australians and New Zealanders of the two Anzac corps rushed at the Germans with their bayonets.

Seeing the furious savagery of the Anzacs some of the Germans pretended to be dead, rather than face the ferocious Antipodeans. However, after the Australians had passed by, some of those Germans got back up again and started firing on the backs of the attackers. The Anzacs turned round, and as one Australian noted, the German deaths, 'were real enough after that'.

The attack upon the Broodseinde Ridge was a complete success, despite the weather. General Plumer saw it as 'the greatest victory since the Marne'; the Germans called 4 October 'the black day'.

Haig's objectives on this occasion had been realistic, and as a result what was actually achieved exceeded expectations. On average, the Anzacs had advanced around 1,000 yards, with the greatest distance being achieved by the 3rd Australian Division which pushed forward more than a mile.

Just what had been achieved was put into words by one Australian soldier: 'From the Broodseinde Ridge the whole field was under observation, and as we gazed back over the country we could see quite plainly the movements of our own units on various duties – guns, transport, men, the lot. The ridge was a prize worth having.' There was, at last, something to celebrate.

BATTLE OF POELCAPPELLE

9 OCTOBER 1917

The successful capture of Broodseinde on 4 October reinforced Field Marshal Haig in his belief that pressure should continue to be exerted upon the Germans who were finding it increasingly difficult to resist the relentless British assaults. The advances that had been made since 31 July had brought the battle's main objective – the capture of Passchendaele and the railway network beyond – almost within reach. With winter approaching, and the prospect of even worse weather ahead, Haig believed that the time had come to set more ambitious targets for the attackers.

The date set for the next Allied attack was 9 October with the aim being the capture of Poelcappelle on the lower slopes of the Passchendaele ridge. The rain, however, was torrential and the ground had become all but impassable. Even the trenches could only be navigated in single file along duckboards. So bad had the conditions become, on 7 October Generals Gough and Plumer confronted Haig once again, asking that the campaign be halted for the winter. The Field Marshal, who was quite certain that the Germans were close to defeat, saw no reason for cancelling the attack, the preparations for which were already well under way.

At 05.00 hours on the 9th the advance on Poelcappelle began. Lieutenant P. King was with the 2/5th Battalion, East Lancashire Regiment: 'It was a nightmare. Often we would have to wait for up to half an hour, because all the time the duckboards were being blown up and men being blown off the track or simply slipping off ... going down into the muck.' The men were given strict instructions not to stop and help any who fell into the mud – there was no time to stop.

A soldier of the 26th Battalion, Northumberland Fusiliers described the conditions: 'It was one vast plain, interspersed by a network of small lakes and holes full of mud. Here and there, stuck amid the mud, gunners were firing on open sites. Four men had made a gallant attempt to bring up rations. All four lay dead, one with his head blown off. Legs and arms jutted out from shell-holes.'

The attack became, quite literally, bogged down and German resistance proved far stronger than Haig had thought possible. Even after the initial assaults, the ordeal did not end, particularly for the wounded, as Colonel H. Stewart recalled: 'Famished and untended on the battlefield ... Those that could not be brought back were dressed in the muddy shell holes ... On the morning of the 12th many of these unfortunate men were still lying upon the battlefield, and not a few had meantime died of exposure in the wet and cold weather.'

Haig had believed that the Germans were on the point of collapse, but it was his own men who were in a state of exhaustion. For it was the attackers who had to try and cross the bogs and the swamps of No Man's Land and it was the British gunners who had to drag their guns through the morass of mud, whilst the Germans sat waiting in their dugouts. Although costly to both sides, it was clear that the Battle of Poelcappelle had been a defensive victory for the German army.

BELOW: An abandoned tank lies amongst shell-blasted trees in what had been a road in or near Poelcappelle. (NARA)

NO.41 WING FORMED

11 OCTOBER 1917

On 1 October 1917, the General Officer Commanding of the Royal Flying Corps in France, Hugh Trenchard, was informed that enemy raids on the UK were interrupting munitions production. Consequently, Trenchard was tasked to undertake immediate action against German objectives that could be reached from the RFC aerodrome at Ochey near Nancy.

By 11 October preparations were ready. It was on this date that the 41st Wing was formed to undertake independent bombing operations against targets inside Germany.

Its first CO was Lieutenant-Colonel Cyril Newall who had, since December 1916, commanded No.9 Wing in France. The author William Edward Fischer described the Wing's formation: 'At Ochey, No. 100 Squadron was joined by "A" Naval Squadron, flying the Handley Page bomber. To these night squadrons was added No. 55 Squadron, flying the [de Havilland] DH4 daylight bomber. The complementary nature of the wing, with a day unit and short- and long-distance night elements, made the reprisal effort extremely flexible.' The scene was therefore set for the strategic bombing campaign against German industry.

The historian H.A. Jones detailed the start of the Wing's work, the target being selected for its 'importance in the system of German war production and military transport': 'The bombing campaign of the Forty-first Wing was opened on the 17th of October 1917 by eight D.H.4s of No. 55 Squadron which attacked the Burbach works near Saarbrucken, an objective which had often been visited by the naval bombers of the Luxeuil Wing.

'A German official report of the attack reads: "Three bombs fell on the railway behind the eastern coke ovens, near a condensing tower, and in front of the foundry casino. Damage resulted to the railway lines, the walls of the condensing tower, and especially to the casino buildings and to neighbouring houses belonging to officials of the company: damage 17,000 marks".

ABOVE: Major General Hugh Trenchard. In August 1915, Trenchard became the RFC's commander in the field, a position he held throughout 1916 and 1917. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

'The night raids began, in bad weather, on the evening of the 24th of October when nine Handley Pages of "A" Naval Squadron, and fourteen F.E.2bs of No. 100 Squadron, again attacked the Burbach works, as well as targets along the railway line between Falkenburg and Saarbrucken. Pilots, some of whom dropped their bombs from a few hundred feet, reported that the town of Saarbrucken was well illuminated. Two of the Handley Pages and two F.E.2bs failed to return from this first raid. On the night of the 30th/31st of October twelve F.E.2bs attacked the steel works and the station at Volklingen. A number of hits were made on the sheds, and the damage was estimated by the Germans at 47,646 marks.'

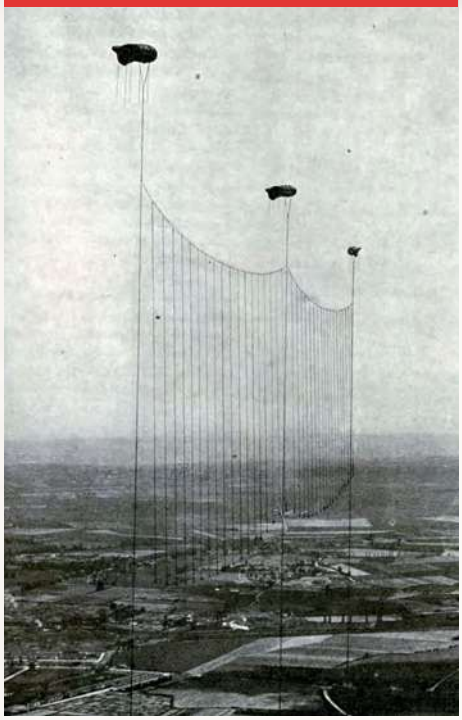
Despite this start, only fourteen missions (five by night) were executed by the Wing before the end of 1917, adverse weather conditions preventing more extensive operations. The Wing itself was officially elevated to brigade status on 28 December 1917, becoming the RFC's VIII Brigade.

LEFT: An example of one of the types operated by the 41st Wing, a Handley Page 0/100 heavy bomber, being towed out for take-off by a crawler tractor. (KEY COLLECTION)

THE SILENT RAID

BELOW: The intact *L.49* pictured at Bourbonne-les-Bains. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

19 OCTOBER 1917



ABOVE: Such was the development of Britain's air raid defences that by the winter of 1917 they included this balloon barrage and curtain. The horizontal top cables extended for 1,000 yards, being held aloft by three balloons. From these hung the steel net. The purpose was to force attacking aircraft up to a predictable height where anti-aircraft guns could concentrate their fire. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

It was the weather systems over the UK that often provided the best protection against the German airship raids on the UK. Indeed, for the early months of 1917 the Germans suspended their airship attacks whilst waiting for the winds to shift. They began again in April 1917, bombing even further afield than before, attacks occurring as far north as Edinburgh and Leith as the navigational skills of their crews improved.

Whilst civilian morale in Britain had been badly affected, the German High Command was also losing faith in the costly airships and the number of raids dwindled. In fact, throughout the whole of 1917 there were only six airship raids. Even so, the Zeppelin lobby in Germany remained strong, with the result that the High Command had commissioned a third type of airship – the so called 'Height Climbers' – to join the existing fleet of 'Super Zeppelins'.

Operating at altitudes in excess of 20,000 feet, a total of eleven airships (accounts vary, as some state thirteen) headed out over southern and central England on 19 October 1917. Their mission was to bomb industrial targets in the Midlands. The attack came to be referred to as 'The Silent Raid' by virtue of the fact that the raiders flew so high that they could not be heard from the ground.

The crews, though, were vulnerable to the extreme cold, lack of oxygen, and on this occasion to the strong winds that wrecked the mission. The Germans had forecast good weather, but no observations were made over 10,000 feet. Above that height the crews faced gale force winds from the north-west. The airships were distorted by the turbulence and, with men struggling to hold the rudders, they were forced off course.

During the attack that night, a 300lb bomb from Zeppelin *L.45* exploded in Glenview Road (now Nightingale Grove), Hither Green. It destroyed three houses and damaged many others. Five women and nine children were killed, seven others injured. It is described as being the last bomb dropped on London by a Zeppelin.

Had it not been for the weather, it is possible that this would have been one of the most successful airship attacks of the war, as not one of the seventy-eight RFC and RNAS aircraft that took to the skies was able to climb high enough to engage the raiders. Despite this, however, five Zeppelins were lost.

L.44 and *L.45* and were shot down over France and Germany by British and French aircraft, whilst *L.55* crashed on its return to base and *L.50* was swept out as far as the Mediterranean and never recovered. The fifth airship lost that night, *L.49*, was forced down by French pilots of Escadrille 152 near Bourbonne-les-Bains in France, becoming the only Zeppelin captured intact during the First World War. Such were the losses, that this was the last big-scale raid carried out by German airships.

ABOVE: One of the reasons that made the capture of Beersheba an important step in the Allied offensive in 1916 was its railway links. This is the station in Beersheba which, built by the Turks, was opened in October 1915. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

ABOVE RIGHT: Remarkably, the station at Beersheba still exists. The memorial in the foreground of this picture, which was unveiled in 2002, commemorates the 298 Turkish soldiers who lost their lives in the Battle of Beersheba. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

ABOVE: Turkish troops at Beersheba whilst being inspected by Enver Pasha. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

BEERSHEBA CAPTURED 31 OCTOBER 1917

Located on the northern edge of the Negev desert, halfway between the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea, the town of Beersheba had developed under Ottoman rule into an important administrative centre. Its capture, therefore, was an important element of the wider British offensive collectively known as the Third Battle of Gaza.

Beersheba's hospital, army barracks, railway station (with water tower), engine sheds, large storage buildings, and a square of houses, were well-designed and strongly-constructed stone buildings. The Turkish defences were garrisoned by 1,000 Turkish riflemen, nine machine-guns and two aircraft. The position was extended through a series of trenches and redoubts placed on commanding positions with good fields of fire; but on the east and south the trenches were not protected by barbed wire. The Turkish forces were relying

on the forbidding open terrain as well as the absence of water to hold Beersheba. The latter, though, was overcome by excellent planning.

By trawling through the records of the Palestine Exploration Fund, and having questioned local Arabs, Allied intelligence officers realised that the ancient towns in the area to the south and south-west of Beersheba must have had water supplies. Reconnaissance soon established that the old wells at Asluj still existed; a fortnight's frantic effort soon saw them back in working order. This meant that an attack on Beersheba was no longer a virtually impossible proposition but a feasible operation.

For many their involvement in the Battle of Beersheba was preceded by a long, hard march. The Australian War Memorial's archives include the testimony of Private Hunter, a member of the 12th Light Horse Regiment. Having set out on 28 October, by the 30th Hunter and his comrades were closing on Beersheba, having passed through Asluj. The final stage of the march, on the evening of the 30th, involved a 'very weary and dusty ride of 30 miles'. In his diary, Hunter wrote: 'The dust was terrible. One could not see beyond his horse's head. The horses braved the journey which was about 36 miles. Walked at my horse's head for about 10 miles of flat country giving him a rest.'

Nevertheless, by the evening of the 30th, preparations for the offensive were complete. No less than 47,500 rifles in the 53rd (Welsh) Division, the 60th (London) Division, and the 74th (Yeomanry) Division, supported by men from the 10th (Irish) Division and the 1/2nd County of London Yeomanry, as well as some 15,000 troopers in two divisions of the Desert Mounted Corps, had been positioned for the attack on Beersheba.

The battle for Beersheba erupted at 05.55 hours on the morning of 31 October when the Allies unleashed a ferocious artillery barrage on the town by over 100 guns, the initial aim of which was to cut the Turkish wire. With this completed, it was intended that the gunners were to subsequently shift their fire to target the Ottoman fortifications, trench lines and rear areas – as well as undertake counter-battery work.

As the shells rained down on the Turkish positions, the enemy gunners replied in kind. 'High explosive is bursting between us and the gun,' recalled one Private Calcutt who was serving in the 2/16th London Regiment (Queen's Westminster Rifles) in the 60th (London) Division. 'Shrapnel comes over. Burst above us and rains down on us. Steady stream of wounds. Young Morrison, elbow. Brown, arm. Low, head, and so on and so on. We ought to move back to our old position. Stupid to be in front of these guns which are banging away all the time, kicking up hells delight, and drawing fire which we are a catching.'

On schedule the three British divisions attacked the Turkish positions from the west and south. Despite bitter fighting, by 13.00 hours they had driven the Turks from their defences in these areas, but the wells of the town were still in Turkish hands. At 15.30 hours, with only a few hours of day light remaining, orders were issued for the final phase of the attack. It was decided that this could be achieved by ordering the Australian 4th Light Horse Brigade to attack the remaining enemy-held trenches from the south-east.

Trooper Edward Dengate was one of those who participated in the charge: 'Captain Davies let out a yell at the top of his voice ... we spurred our horses ... the bullets got thicker ... three or four horses came down, others with no riders on kept going, the saddles splashed with blood, here and there a man running toward a dead horse for cover, the Turk's trenches were about fifty yards on my right, I could see the Turk's heads over the edge of the trenches squinting along their rifles, a lot of the fellows dismounted at that point thinking we were to take the trenches, but most of us kept straight on, where I was there was a clear track with trenches on the right and a redoubt on the left, some of the chaps jumped clear over the trenches in places, some fell into them, although about 150 men got through and raced for the town, they went up the street yelling like madmen.'

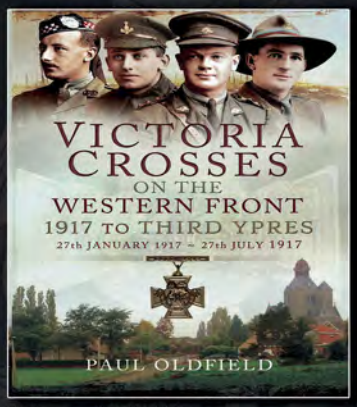
Thirty-one light horsemen were killed in what is described by some as 'the last great cavalry charge'; a further thirty-six were wounded. Beersheba, however, had fallen to the Allies. The Turkish defenders suffered many casualties and between 700 and 1,000 men were taken prisoner.

The successful capture of Beersheba opened the way for a general outflanking of the Turks' Gaza-Beersheba Line. After severe fighting Ottoman forces abandoned Gaza on 6 November 1917 and began their withdrawal into Palestine. On 9 December 1917 British troops entered Jerusalem.

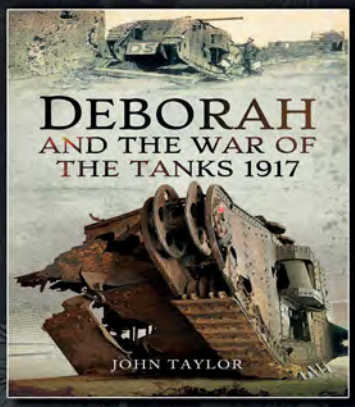
The charge of the Australian Light Horse at Beersheba as depicted in this painting by George Lambert which was completed in 1920. (COURTESY OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL; ART02811)

Pen & Sword Books

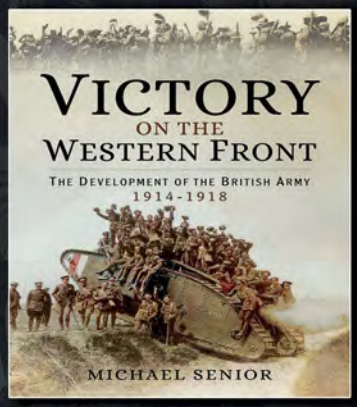
25% OFF



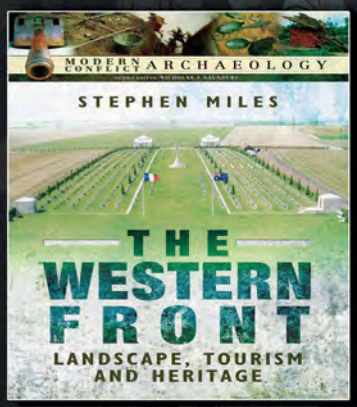
Was: £19.99
Now: £14.99
ISBN: 9781473827073



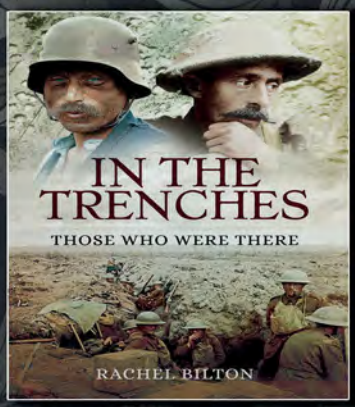
Was: £25.00
Now: £18.75
ISBN: 9781473848344



Was: £25.00
Now: £18.75
ISBN: 9781783400652

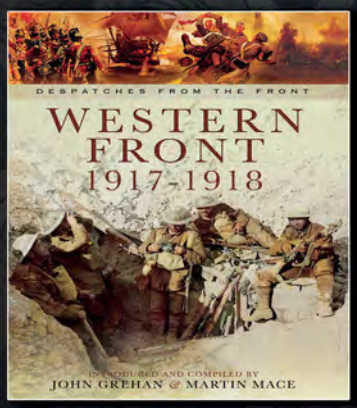


Was: £19.99
Now: £14.99
ISBN: 9781473833760

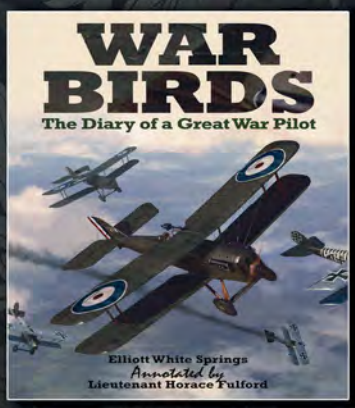


Was: £19.99
Now: £14.99
ISBN: 9781473867130

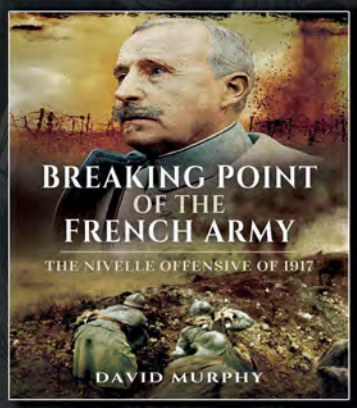
Was: £25.00
Now: £18.75
ISBN: 9781473870864



Was: £25.00
Now: £18.75
ISBN: 9781781593233



Was: £25.00
Now: £18.75
ISBN: 9781473879591



Was: £19.99
Now: £14.99
ISBN: 9781781592922

Call 01226 734 222 or visit www.pen-and-sword.co.uk
and quote code **GW1917** to claim your discount.

2 NOVEMBER 1917

ABOVE: Prime Minister David Lloyd George walking with the Foreign Secretary, Arthur James Balfour, during the time of the Allied Conference in Paris, July 1917. (BOTH US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

THE BALFOUR DECLARATION

The 'Jewish Question' had troubled governments across Europe since the eighteenth century. In most countries of Europe, the Jews, who in those days were often the only significant immigrant minority, were the subject of widespread discrimination. The only solution to the Question, it seemed, was to give the Jews a home of their own. Britain led the way in this, offering, in 1903, to give a part of British East Africa to the Jewish people. This, the 'Uganda Scheme', was welcomed by some Jewish leaders. Others, though, wanted their homeland to be in the region from where the Jews originated – Palestine. This land was part of the Turkish Ottoman Empire and was already occupied by Arabs. There seemed, therefore, no possibility of establishing the homeland the Jews desired. But then came the First World War, and the Turks joined the Central Powers against Britain and her Allies.

In 1915 Britain told Arab leaders that they would be granted control over their own lands if they helped the Allies defeat the Turks. Consequently, the Arabs revolted, helping to tie down considerable numbers of Turkish forces. What the Arabs did not know was that a secret agreement (the Sykes-Picot Agreement) was reached between Britain and France to take over Arabia and Palestine after the defeat of the Turks, with the latter falling within what would become the British-controlled sphere. This gave Britain the opportunity to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

This was made public by Arthur Balfour, the British Foreign Secretary, on 9 November 1917, the so-called 'declaration' having been compiled a week earlier on 2 November: 'His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.'

Needless to say, the Arabs were outraged, and they refused to recognise any such Jewish state. But there were other factors at play beyond the desire to give the Jews a land of their own. It was thought that a Jewish presence in Palestine friendly to Britain would strengthen the UK's position on the Suez Canal and reinforce the route to India. It was also felt that the strong Jewish community in America would press for greater funding of the US war effort, and that the revolutionaries in Russia, many of the leading members of which were Jews, would seek to continue the war against Germany in the East. Unfortunately, this last hope was dashed when the Bolsheviks sought an armistice with the Central Powers.

ABOVE: Three of the main British officials relating to the Balfour Declaration pictured during the 1925 opening of Hebrew University. From left to right they are Lord Allenby (commander of British forces in Palestine 1917), Lord Balfour, and Sir Herbert Samuel, first British High Commissioner of the Mandate.

9 NOVEMBER 1917

THE FIRST TANK BANK

ABOVE: Tank 130 *Nelson* pictured during its travels with its 'on tour' crew in front. (COURTESY OF THE TANK MUSEUM)

ABOVE: One of the six Tank Banks pictured whilst on display in Trafalgar Square, London, during November 1917. The partially visible number on the rear suggests that this is Tank 130, *Nelson*. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

Dating back before 1535, the Lord Mayor's Show is one of the longest established and best known annual events in London. Even the outbreak of war in 1914 failed to bring the tradition to an end. In fact, the show in 1917, held on Friday, 9 November, was a particularly memorable event.

'This year's Lord Mayor's Show ... will be remembered as the most dignified and impressive of modern times,' wrote one reporter. 'Apart from the Lord Mayor himself (Alderman Charles Hanson), in his coach, and representatives of some of the City Companies, the procession was, in reality, a great naval and military pageant, and the presence in it of the Overseas contingents gave it an Imperial character. It was an epitome, not only of the fighting services, but of the whole national war effort, including the work of the women in munition-factories, on the land, and in various other activities.'

If there was one thing that caught the reporter's eye, however, it was the presence of two tanks in the procession. 'Vehicles never before seen,' he continued, 'perambulating London streets. They aroused much enthusiasm.'

'Brilliant sunshine favoured the Lord Mayor's Show,' noted a different correspondent for the *Evening Telegraph and Post*. 'The streets through which the possession made its way from the Guildhall to the Law Courts was thronged with sightseers, and the soldiers and sailors taking part in the pageant were loudly cheered.'

For those present, there was the opportunity to see captured German and Turkish field guns and howitzers – even a captured German aircraft was wheeled out for the public to admire. Once again, though, it was the presence of two British tanks that made the day for this witness. 'Outstanding features in the procession were the presence of two tanks,' he noted. The interest that these two armoured giants generated was quite understandable for it was the first time that the general public was able to see for themselves one of the most remarkable inventions of the First World War.

Following the Lord Mayor's Show, which involved a pair of Mark IV tanks, one or more of the new 'wonder weapons' made their way to Trafalgar Square where they were put on static display to support fund raising for the war effort. It was at this stage that the term 'Tank Banks' was first mentioned.

It is known that one of these exhibited tanks was *Nelson*, tank No.130. One member of *Nelson*'s crew at this stage was Corporal 'Billy' Brandon. A veteran of the use of tanks on the Western Front, Brandon was *Nelson*'s driver. In one speech supporting the Tank Bank tours, Brandon is reported as saying: 'All the boys at the front are hungry for peace, but, if it is to be peace branded with the words "Made in Germany," the lads in the trenches will try to forget their hunger and fight on, since no other than a British peace will suit them.'

The Tank Banks proved to be a popular draw and the decision was taken to capitalise on this by the National War Savings Committee. Six travelling tanks – *Egbert* (Tank No.141), *Nelson* (130), *Julian* (113), *Old Bill* (119), *Drake* (137) and

ABOVE: Tank 119, *Old Bill*, pictured during Birmingham's Tank Bank week which ran from 31 December 1917 to 5 January 1918. On occasions such as that seen here, the tank would arrive with great fanfare, after which civic dignitaries and local celebrities would greet the tank and speeches would often be made atop it. (COURTESY OF THE TANK MUSEUM)

RIGHT: Such was the interest in the Tank Banks that they spawned a number of smaller versions to be used as piggy banks. The example seen here was based on Tank 119, *Old Bill*. (COURTESY OF RICHARD SMITH; EUROPEANA1914-1918)

Iron Rations (142) – were despatched around the country to promote the sale of War Bonds. The tanks, all Male versions, travelled by rail and at each location the skeleton crew had to reinstate the sponsons, drive into the town or city centre and then act as a platform for speakers and as a sales point for bonds. The itinerary was often gruelling; occasionally the timetable lists a tank appearing at two different locations on a single day.

The use of tanks was a success, and large sums of money were raised for the war effort. When Tank 141, *Egbert*, participated in Preston's Tank Week (21 to 28 January 1918), one of the largest contributions received was £100,000 from Blackburn-born mill owner William Birtwhistle. When *Egbert* proceeded on to Blackburn itself the following week Birtwhistle donated a further £116,000, making it quite clear that he would not be outdone by Preston!

In some instances company directors offered incentives to their employees to participate in the scheme. Notable amongst these were the directors of the Great North of Scotland Railway (GNSR) based in Aberdeen who offered prizes to the value of £100 to employees that purchased bonds. The bonds were sold in £5 units but for staff that had a little less money to invest, War Savings Certificates at 15/6 each were the alternative and purchasers of these would also be entered into the prize draw. For a bit of excitement prospective investors could buy their bonds and certificates at the tank itself – Tank 113, which was named *Julian*.

Such was the success of the Tank Banks that Mr Bonar Law made the following statement in the House of Commons on 14 May 1918: 'The tanks have supplied a great many of the millions which the War Bonds have produced, and much of this money has come from the pockets of the poor man, who before the War had no money to invest, but who is now in a position to do so.'

Exactly how much the Tank Banks help to raise will be never be known, but they undoubtedly played their part in securing the Armistice in November 1918.

The tank named *Julian* pictured during one of its appearances in England – on this occasion during Worcester's Tank Week which was held between 18 and 23 March 1918. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

LEFT: Stretcher bearers struggle through the mud at Passchendaele. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

BELOW: A picture that epitomises the conditions in which much of the fighting on the Western Front in 1917, particularly during the Third Battle of Ypres, took place. It shows troops of the Canadian 16th Machine Gun Company holding the line in atrocious conditions on the Passchendaele front in late October or early November, 1917. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

PASSCHENDAELE ENDS

10 NOVEMBER 1917

It was the British Fifth Army that was to deliver the final attack upon Passchendaele. The First Battle of Passchendaele on 12 October had seen the Germans hold their ground and inflict greater casualties upon the attackers than they had themselves sustained.

The fighting continued on a reduced scale over the subsequent days before the last great effort was made in what became known as the Second Battle of Passchendaele, which opened on 26 October. The attacking force was provided by the Canadian Corps, I Anzac Corps and the British X Corps.

Private R. Le Bon was a member of the 16th Canadian Machine Gun Company, ordered to provide covering fire for the attackers: 'It was only a quarter of a mile or so from the front [to Ypres], and the whole way was nothing but shell-holes with bodies floating in them. It always seemed worse when you didn't see the whole body, maybe just legs and boots sticking out from the sides ... We were right out in front of the line, and the mud was so deep in our shell-holes that we had to put at least six boxes of ammunition underneath us.'

The first assault was repulsed, so, on the night of the 27th, the Canadians tried again. 'During the hours of darkness the scene on the battlefield up in front is awful beyond description,' recalled a member of the Canadian Mounted Rifles. 'Stretcher-parties worked doggedly in the almost hopeless task of caring for the countless wounded who mingle with the dead.' The night attack proved a success, with high ground on the Passchendaele ridge finally taken.

After a further phase of assaults, there was a pause in operations to allow the British Second Army to relieve the troops at the front. The last stage of the struggle for Passchendaele took place on 6 November. In just three hours the village of Passchendaele was in the hands of the Allied troops. It had taken ninety-seven days since the opening attack on 31 July to get there. The end of the offensive came after a small action by the Canadians on 10 November to seize a section of tactically important ground.

The Allies had not been able to penetrate as far as the railway junction they sought to reach. The Germans had demonstrated that they were far from being a spent force, inflicting somewhere between 200,000 and 400,000 casualties, though they themselves suffered similar losses. According to Lloyd George, writing in 1938, 'Passchendaele was indeed one of the greatest disasters of the war ... No soldier of any intelligence now defends this senseless campaign.'

The Battle of Passchendaele is best summed up in this account by one of the survivors writing on 7 November: 'A time was set for parade and roll-call. There wasn't too many of us left to answer our names.'

STATEMENT IN PARLIAMENT

ABOVE: British troops with a captured German field gun during the Battle of Messines.

15 NOVEMBER 1917

BELOW: Turkish prisoners of war under British guard during 1917. (BOTH US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

On 15 November, Brigadier General Henry Croft, the Member of Parliament for Christchurch in Dorset, asked the Government what was the approximate total square mileage of territory conquered, or re-conquered, by British forces since 1 July 1916, the First Day of the Battle of the Somme?

In response, the Financial Secretary to the War Office, Mr Henry Forster, the Member for Sevenoaks, stated that, 'The total square mileage of territory conquered or reconquered by British Armies in all theatres since 1st July, 1916, is about 128,000 square miles. This figure is necessarily only approximate, as in some theatres of war no hard-and-fast line can be drawn between territory in enemy and British occupation on a given date.'

Brigadier Croft than asked what were the totals of prisoners, guns, and, what he defined as 'booty' that had been captured from the Turkish Empire since that significant date of 1 July 1916?

Once again, the Government's answer was delivered by the Financial Secretary to the War Office. 'The totals of prisoners and guns captured from the Turks by our Armies since 1st July, 1916, are as follows: Prisoners, 30,197; Guns, 186.' Mr Forster then added: 'These figures represent the number reported up to the present, but the returns from the Palestine front are still incomplete.' He told the House that he had not so far received any details regarding 'booty', but that he would circulate the Official Report on the British Army's operations in the Middle East when all the information had been made available.

Though he had no information to give to the Commons regarding Palestine, he did have a list of the items taken by the British in Mesopotamia. These were an impressive, fifty-two machine-guns, thirty-two trench mortars, 240 trucks, several miles of railway track, twenty-one engines, large quantities of miscellaneous engineering material, clothing, equipment, and transport animals, as well as a number of aeroplanes and aero engines and large quantities of rifles and ammunition. On the great rivers of Mesopotamia, the Euphrates and the Tigris, Britain had re-captured the Fly-class river gunboat, HMS *Firefly*, as well as taking four steamers, two tugs, ten barges, two steam launches, and thirty pontoons.

Warming to his task, or having already been coached with the questions he tabled, Brigadier Forster, asked: 'What are the total numbers of prisoners and guns captured by the British armies on the Western Front since 1 July, 1916; and what are the total number of prisoners and guns captured by British arms on all fronts since the commencement of the War?'

Again Henry Forster answered: 'The total number of prisoners captured on the Western Front since 1st July, 1916, is 101,534. The total number of guns captured in the same period is 519. Since the commencement of the War the British armies have captured on all fronts about 166,000 prisoners and over 800 guns.'

It all sounded like good news; it also sounded rather contrived – a good news story to deflect from the demoralising events at Passchendaele perhaps?

THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI

20 NOVEMBER 1917

TOP: A Mark IV tank of the 7th Battalion, having been lost in the Battle of Cambrai, is inspected by German troops. This particular tank, *Ghurka*, was part of No.12 Section, 21st Company. Commanded by Acting Captain C.H. Kinnison, it was destroyed in Bourlon Wood on the fourth day of the battle, 23 November 1917. Kinnison was awarded a Bar to the Military Cross for laying a tape under enemy fire on the night of 20-21 November to guide the attack on Graincourt. (COURTESY OF BRETT BUTTERWORTH)

RIGHT: German soldiers make preparations to recover a knocked out Mark IV from the Cambrai battlefield, November 1917. (BUNDESARCHIV, BILD104-0941A/CC-BY-SA)

The Passchendaele offensive had ground on for months with no sign of a breakthrough. Casualties had amounted to around 200,000 men and all that had been gained was a few hundred yards of ground. It was against this background that Colonel J.F.C. Fuller, a staff officer with the Tank Corps, proposed 'a tank raid south of Cambrai'. Unlike the sticky, cratered fields of Flanders, the ground underneath the open, rolling countryside there was hard and firm. It was perfect terrain for tanks.

With time, this idea developed from a raid into a major assault which, with the Germans tied down at Passchendaele, would penetrate the Hindenburg Line between the Escaut Canal and the Canal du Nord and would result in the capture of Cambrai itself. The town of Cambrai was a key supply centre which lay some six miles behind the Hindenburg Line.

The Germans considered the Line to be impregnable and was a vital component in their long-term strategy for winning the war. To break through such a barrier, General Byng's Third Army was to be deployed and the tanks, in great numbers, would lead the attack. On the day before the attack, 19 November, Brigadier-General Hugh Elles, commanding the Tank Corps, issued Special Order No.6: 'Tomorrow the Tank Corps will have the chance for which it has been waiting for many months – to operate on good going in the van of the battle ... I propose leading the attack of the centre division.'

The tanks had been brought up into position behind the British lines by 05.00 hours on the dull, misty morning of 20 November. For days they had been moved secretly by train at night.

At 06.20 hours a total of 376 tanks set off from behind the British lines. Unlike previous attacks, which would be preceded by a massive days-long artillery barrage to blast away the barbed wire and demolish the enemy trenches, only a brief bombardment would announce the start of the attack. It would be up to the tanks to punch a hole in the German lines which the infantry could exploit.

The artillery opened fire only as the tanks crossed the start line followed closely by the infantry. The Germans were taken completely unawares.

'As we lurched along, we expected the most frightful crash to come at any minute,' remembered one tank crew member. 'It seemed almost too good to be true, this steady rumbling forward over marvellous going, no craters in the ground, no shelling from the enemy, and our infantry following steadily behind.

'Emerging out of the gloom, a dark mass came steadily towards us – the German wire. It appeared absolutely impenetrable. It was

certainly the thickest and deepest I had ever seen, stretching in front of us in three belts, each about fifty yards deep. It neither stopped our tank nor broke up and wound round the tracks as we feared, but squashed flat as we moved forward and remained flat. A broad carpet of wire was left behind us, as wide as our tank, over which the infantry were able to pick their way without difficulty.'

The German troops had gone down into their deep dugouts when the barrage began, leaving just a few look-outs above ground. Before they were aware of what was happening the tanks were on top of them.

Captain D.G. Browne of 'F' Battalion was delighted with the degree of surprise that had been achieved. 'The immediate onset of the tanks was overwhelming,' he wrote. 'The German outposts, dazed or annihilated by the sudden deluge of shells, were overrun in an instant. The triple belts of wire were crossed as if they had been beds of nettles, and 350 pathways were sheared through them for the infantry. The defenders of the front trench, scrambling out of the dug-outs and shelters to meet the crash and flame of the barrage, saw the leading tanks almost upon them, their appearance made the more grotesque and terrifying by the huge black bundles [of fascines] they carried on their cabs. As these tanks swung left-handed and fired down into the trench, others, also surmounted by these appalling objects, appeared in multitudes behind them out of the mist. It is small wonder that the front Hindenburg Line, that fabulous excavation which was to be the bulwark of Germany, gave little trouble.

'The great fascines were loosed and rolled over the parapet to the trench floor; and down the whole line, tanks were dipping and rearing up and clawing their way across into the almost unravaged country beyond. The defenders of the line were running panic stricken, casting away arms and equipment.'

All along the front, the attackers broke through. By 08.00 hours the tanks and infantry had overrun the Hindenburg Main Line, and by 11.30 hours they had taken the Hindenburg Support Line in many places. The attack, though, was not a 100 per cent success as the tanks were unable to reach one of the main objectives of the attack, the village of Flesquières, where a double line of deep trenches and much barbed wire ran across its front. As the tanks crested the ridge, some in line abreast as ordered, others in line astern, the German guns opened fire at a range of 500 yards. The effects were devastating and one by one the tanks, silhouetted against the skyline, were picked off.

The battle lasted officially until 7 December. In all, 179 of the 376 tanks involved were lost at Cambrai, sixty-five of these by direct hits. Despite this, morale amongst the tank crews, which had suffered with the disappointing performance of the machines in the muddy terrain around Ypres, was lifted immeasurably. Though the gains achieved on that first day of the Battle of Cambrai were lost when the Germans counter-attacked on 30 November, the great success experienced by the tanks led to the soldier-historian Basil Liddell Hart declaring: 'Cambrai had changed the tactical climate of the war – and of warfare.'

LEFT: The wreckage of a tank destroyed during the Battle of Cambrai. It is possible that this is the same tank seen in the coloured image, but viewed from a different side. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

BELOW: The original caption to this image states that it shows troops sheltering near a knocked-out tank on the Cambrai battlefield. The muddy conditions suggest that the photograph was taken after the fighting began. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

RUSSIA'S PEACE PLAN

1 DECEMBER 1917

ABOVE: Russian soldiers pictured during a parade in 1917. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

The year 1917 marked a watershed in Russian history. On 23 February, 90,000 female factory workers marched through the streets of St Petersburg, (which had been re-named Petrograd in 1914) to protest at working conditions, the shortage of food and the war which had proven to be very costly both to the Army and the economy.

The following day even more people took to the streets of the Russian capital, and by the third day of protests the city had been brought to a standstill. Within a week, Tsar Nicholas II had abdicated, and the Russian Republic was declared. The new government was a combination of what was termed the Petrograd Soviet and the national Provisional Government.

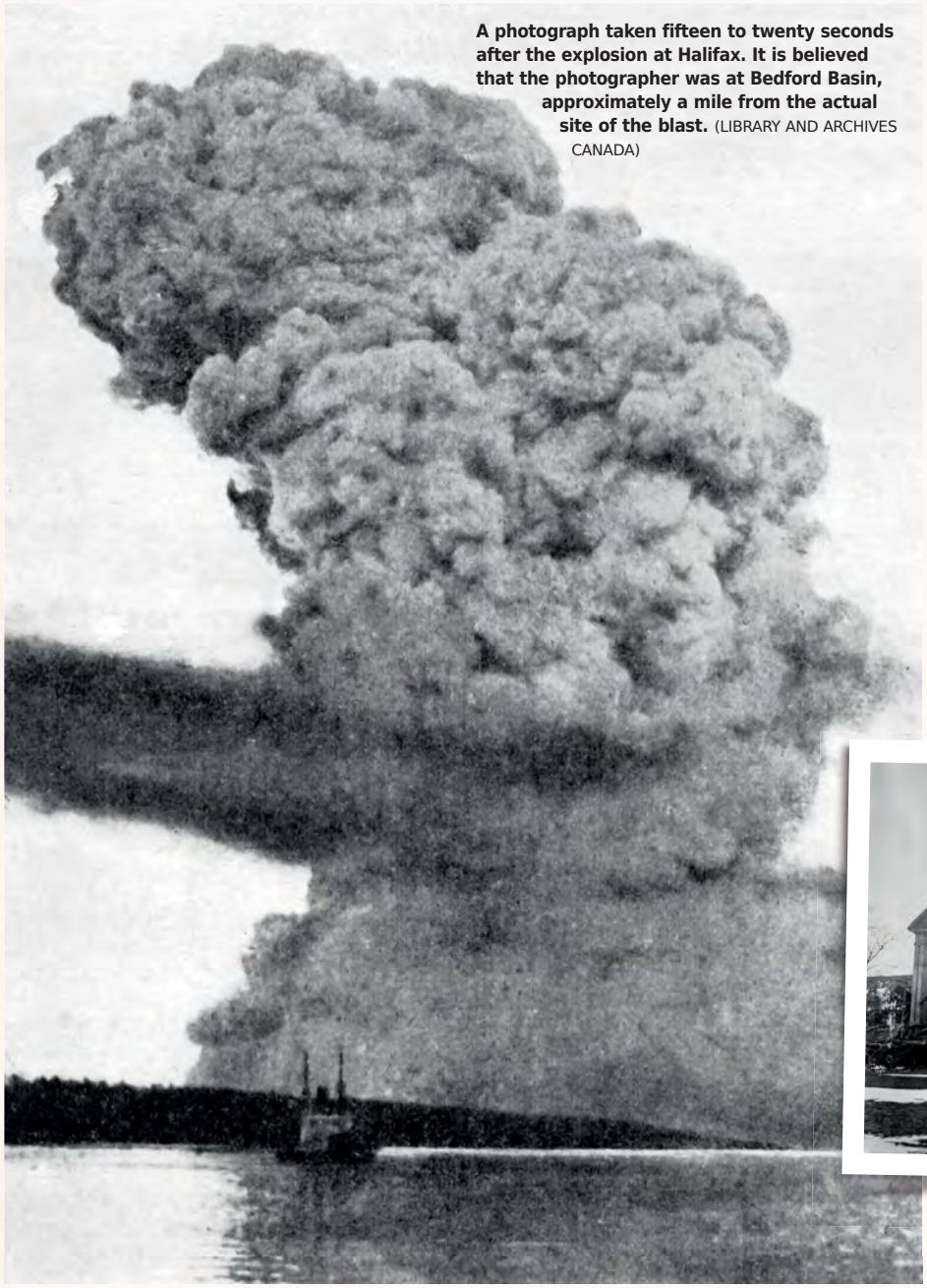
Such an arrangement only added to the country's widespread instability and in October the Bolshevik party, led by Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, better known as Lenin, staged a coup d'état without opposition. Lenin announced the end of all private land ownership and allowed workers to have control of their factories. He also declared that he would end Russia's participation in the war.

This was not just a practical move to end the bloodshed. The Bolsheviks believed that wars between nations were caused by the rich and powerful – by men who would themselves never be under fire. The fighting, and the maiming and the dying, was always done by the lowest in society. Whilst the landowners and the factory owners benefitted by increased demand for their produce and products, for which they could charge inflated prices, the poor and the peasants slaved away in the fields and the factories, or threw themselves at the muzzles of the guns of the so-called enemy. There was never, they believed, any benefit or advantage for the poorer classes in warfare.

The initial move towards peace took place on 1 December with the first meeting of the opposing parties. A member of the Russian delegation recorded the events of that day: 'At 5 o'clock, our eyes blindfolded, we were conducted to a battalion staff of the German Army ... The negotiations were conducted in French. Our proposal to carry on negotiations for an armistice on all the fronts of belligerent countries, in order later to make peace, was immediately handed over to the staff of the division, whence it was sent by direct wire to the staff commander of the eastern front and to the chief commander of the German armies.' Four days later a local armistice was signed between the Russians and the Germans. This ceasefire enabled the two sides to discuss the possibility of Russia withdrawing from the conflict and thus pave the way for a full peace settlement.

The final agreement, which had serious consequences for the fighting in the west, was signed on 15 December at Brest-Litovsk, though this was not implemented until 1918 after a brief resumption of hostilities.

BELOW: Soldiers and civilians alike demonstrating in St Petersburg during the political upheaval in Russia in 1917. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)



A photograph taken fifteen to twenty seconds after the explosion at Halifax. It is believed that the photographer was at Bedford Basin, approximately a mile from the actual site of the blast. (LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA)

ABOVE: The damaged main building of the Nova Scotia Provincial Exhibition, Halifax, pictured after the explosion. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

HALIFAX EXPLOSION

6 DECEMBER 1917

The SS *Mont-Blanc* was a 3,121-ton freighter built in Middlesbrough and which had been launched in 1899 before being purchased by the French Société Générale de Transport Maritime. She had been chartered to carry a full load of military explosives of varying types from New York to France, and on the morning of Thursday, 6 December 1917, she entered Halifax harbour in Nova Scotia where she was due to join a convoy for her voyage to Europe.

A pilot, Francis Mackey, had boarded the freighter the evening before and, when learning of her cargo of TNT, picric acid, guncotton and high-octane benzole, had asked the port authorities for 'special protections', but no such assistance was forthcoming.

Having been forced to wait overnight outside the harbour, when the anti-submarine nets were raised on the morning of the 6th, Mackey guided the ship towards Bedford Basin where the convoy was being assembled. At the same time that *Mont-Blanc* was entering the harbour, the steamship *Imo* was heading out – but *Imo* was on the wrong side of the channel and heading straight towards her!

Just a few moments earlier *Imo* had been forced across the channel by the American tramp steamer SS *Clara* which had been travelling up the wrong (western) side of the harbour. It then encountered a tugboat which compelled the pilot to move *Imo* even further towards the western shore – and directly into the path of *Mont-Blanc* and its highly volatile cargo.

Francis Mackey, who was on the correct side of the channel, saw that the two vessels were on a collision course and he gave a blast on the ship's horn to warn *Imo*. The pilot on *Imo*, which was a difficult vessel to manoeuvre, replied with two blasts to indicate that he wanted to pass starboard-to-starboard, contrary to normal procedure. This would have driven *Mont-Blanc* dangerously closer to the shore, something Mackey sought to avoid with the dangerous cargo the ship was carrying. At the last minute Mackey swung to port, passing across the bows of *Imo*, whilst the latter tried to reverse. It was all too late and the ships collided.

As the ships disengaged, sparks flew which ignited some of the benzole which had spilled out of barrels that had broken loose in the collision. The resultant fire soon spread out of control, and the crew abandoned ship. At 09.04 hours *Mont-Blanc* exploded. Approximately 2,000 people were killed by debris, fires, or collapsed buildings, and it is estimated that over 9,000 people were injured. All but one member of *Mont-Blanc*'s crew survived.

A court of inquiry followed, and litigation continued in the courts into the 1920s. The final verdict found that both ships were guilty of navigational errors. ●

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM 9 DECEMBER 1917

ABOVE: An aerial photograph of Jerusalem and its surroundings which, dated 1917, was taken by a German aircraft. The British advance on the city was, generally speaking, from the left hand side of the image.

Throughout late October and early November 1917, the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF), consisting of XX Corps, XXI Corps and the Desert Mounted Corps, had pushed the German-led Ottoman Turks gradually further north and east. Victories at Mughar Ridge, Beersheba and Gaza had enabled General Edmund Allenby to set his sights on the Holy City of Jerusalem.

The city lies high up in the plateau of central Judea. Allenby, though, did not want to fight in the vicinity of the Holy City. If any of Jerusalem's sacred sites were damaged it would present the Turks with a propaganda weapon they would be all too ready to use. So, rather than a direct assault he planned an encircling movement, cutting Turkish communications, thus compelling the garrison to surrender. That, at least, was the plan.

Operations began on 19 November with the 75th Division, which consisted mostly of West Country regiments, moving up the main road from Jaffa to Jerusalem. This was the only metalled road in the entire area. The 52nd (Lowland) Division and the Yeomanry Mounted Division advanced on the left flank of the 75th Division, all three meeting up to cut the Nablus-Jerusalem road.

The very day the advance had began the weather broke, with heavy and cold winter rains making conditions difficult. Turkish troops were also encountered, many of whom were holding strong defensive positions from which they were only driven out with difficulty.

By 21 November, however, the Allied troops had reached the dominating hill of Nabi Samwil. With just three miles to the Holy City, it was small wonder that this feature was referred to as 'the key to Jerusalem'. The hill was stormed and carried by men of the 234th Brigade that evening.

The moment when Jerusalem surrendered. Reputedly taken at 08.00 hours on the morning of 9 December 1917, this picture shows the moment that the Mayor of Jerusalem, Hussein Bey al-Husayni, in the centre with the walking stick, met Sergeant F.G. Harcomb and Sergeant J. Sedgewick of 2/19th London Regiment, under the white flag of surrender. Hussein Bey al-Husayni, who had been the Mayor of Jerusalem since 1909, signed the official decree of surrender a few days later, handing the keys of the city gates to General Edmund Allenby. He died shortly after in January 1919. (ALL IMAGES US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

Taking the next important height, the El Jib, however, proved beyond the capacity of infantry alone. The first attack took place on the 23rd, delivered by the 5th Battalion Somerset Regiment, supported by the 2/3rd Gurkhas. They had 2,000 yards of open ground to cover before they could reach the high ground where the Turks were waiting. 'Directly the extended lines of the Somersets emerged they came under shrapnel and high explosive,' details one account. 'The battalion went steadily forward, despite its losses, and actually reached the foot of El Jib. A few men even succeeded in scrambling up the terraces, carrying three Lewis guns with them, and entering the village, but they were all killed or captured.'

After repeated assaults over the course of two days, Allenby called off the attack. The Turks even undertook a serious attempt to re-capture Nabi Samwil. It seemed that the Turks were going to make a very stout defence of Jerusalem.

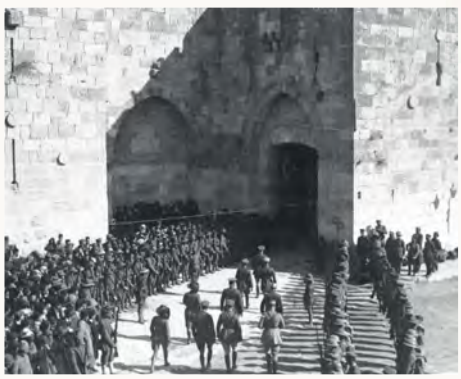
As the EEF consolidated its position and built up its strength for another assault upon El Jib, the Turks attacked its lines. Whilst such raids were taking place, the bulk of Mustafa Fevzi Çakmak's Turkish Seventh Army, some 16,000 strong, remained strongly entrenched in the hills to the west of Jerusalem.

To overcome such strong positions, XX Corps' commander, General Philip Chetwode, devised a plan whereby his men would pivot at Nabi Samwil on the left, with his right swinging round the western suburbs of Jerusalem before cutting the Nablus road. This would enable him to bring up his artillery along the Jaffa road, the only one along which heavy guns could move.

By the end of the first week of December XX Corps was ready. On the night of 6/7 December the 179th Brigade took the high ground to the south of Aim Karim, some three miles to the south of Nabi Samwil.

The main attack on Jerusalem was to be delivered on 8 December 1917. That morning Lieutenant Colonel H. Bayley, the commanding officer of the 303rd Brigade, Royal Field Artillery (60th Division), was cautiously approaching Jerusalem, having met no resistance so far that day.

BELOW: After the evacuation of Jerusalem by the Ottoman Seventh Army (which was in effect the result of a communication error), enemy troops undertook a number of counter-attacks with the aim of recapturing the city. One of these, launched at 01.30 hours on 27 December 1917, was centered on Tell el Ful, a hill east of the Nablus road about three miles north of Jerusalem. Though ultimately unsuccessful, this attack did drive some British units back. Here, in the aftermath of the counter-attack, a British burial party is pictured at a Turkish mass grave at Tell el Ful.



ABOVE: General Allenby's party is pictured about to walk through Jerusalem's Jaffa Gate during his formal entry into the city on 11 December 1917. The leading figure is that of Borton Pacha, the British Military Governor of the city, followed by his two Aides-de-Camp.

'At the top of the hill I came to houses on the outskirts of the town, still no sniping,' he wrote. 'Suddenly ahead I spotted a white flag and to my utter astonishment it appeared through my glasses that numbers of persons surrounded it and that three were coming towards me ... Well, I beckoned the leading one and he came up to me ... He said the Turks ... had bolted in the night and that the mayor of the town was at the flag ... I walked on to him and there he was with three chairs in a row on the road. I sat down with the mayor on one side and his chief of police on the other, when the mayor formally said that he wished to hand over the city to the British authorities as the Turks had fled, so I accepted the city.'

Apparently the mayor and his contingent had been wandering round trying to find someone to surrender to. His first appeal was to two mess cooks of 2/20th London Regiment who had become lost during the night and had blundered into Jerusalem in search of water. The cooks declined the mayor's offer of surrender, feeling that their rank did not merit such an honour.

ABOVE: The battered remains of the Mosque at Nabi Samwil pictured after the fighting of 21-22 November 1917.

The mayor then came upon Sergeant F.G. Harcomb (also spelt Hurcomb) and Sergeant J. Sedgewick of 2/19th London Regiment. These two also refused to accept the surrender of the greatest city in the Middle East. Eventually, after two junior officers of the 60th Division had also declined to accept such a responsibility, the mayor stumbled upon Lieutenant Colonel Bayley – and Jerusalem was finally handed over to the British.

The fall of Jerusalem marked the effective end to the 1917 Palestine campaign. The Allies had now captured Mecca, Baghdad and Jerusalem, with Medina under siege and certain to fall. Turkey had lost control of the great religious cities which meant the Arabs no longer needed to honour their allegiance with the Ottomans.

THE 'HERO LAND' BAZAAR

12 DECEMBER 1917

LEFT: A poster which, depicting the tank *Britannia*, was used to promote the Hero Land Exhibition which was held in New York's Grand Central Palace between 24 November and 12 December 1917.

BELOW: A view of *Britannia* passing down New York's Fifth Avenue on 27 September 1918, prior to its involvement in the Hero Land Exhibition. (BOTH US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

The Hero Land Exhibition was held in New York's Grand Central Palace between 24 November and 12 December 1917. The object of the event was 'to bring home in vivid pictures to the American people some of the actualities of warfare as carried on by the Germans'. One of the most prominent exhibits, supplied by the British government, was a Mark IV tank.

A report in the *Vassar Miscellany News* pointed out, on 10 November 1917, that the Grand Central Palace was transformed for the exhibition, which included reproductions of forts, trench lines, bomb shelters, and battlefields (one of which, located in the basement, was reportedly modelled on a section of the Hindenburg Line): 'It will be held in Grand Central Palace which occupies a block on Lexington Avenue. Practically the entire building and the one next will be given up to the Bazaar for nineteen days beginning on November 24. The entire proceeds over and above expenses will be devoted to war sufferers.'

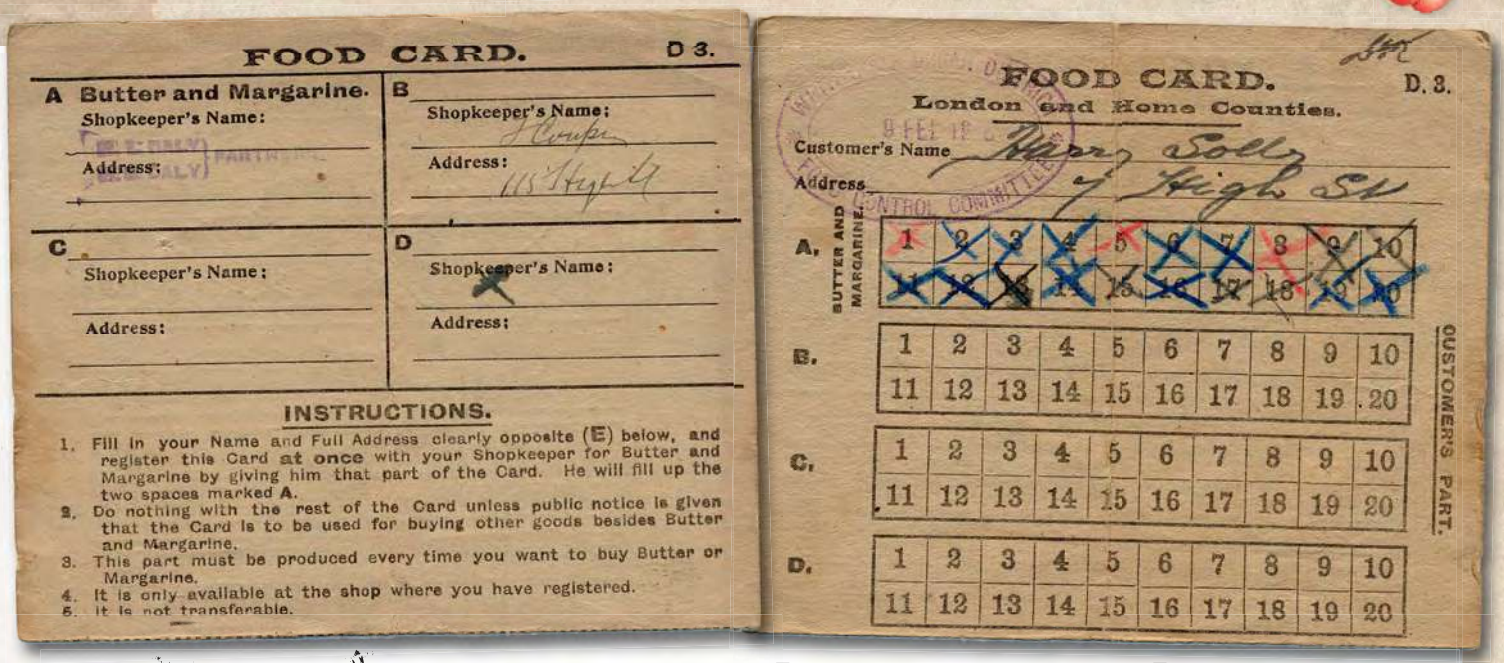
The following account provides more detail: 'The "Heroland" Bazaar, described on the programme as "the greatest spectacle the world has ever seen for the greatest need the world has ever known," opened its doors to New York last evening, and, in the course of a few hours entertained more than 10,000 visitors. It is a magnificent spectacle, magnificently staged in the Grand Central Palace with the aid of 67 war relief organizations wider the auspices of the League of the Allies.

'One of its chief features is an exhibition of British war relics which has arrived here at exactly the right moment after a triumphant tour through the country. Its management and arrangement is transferred to a committee of Americans, Englishmen, and Canadians ...

'The bazaar, of course, is making the most of a Tank brought here at the request of Lord Northcliffe. Daily for the next 10 days this Tank will charge over German trenches, firing its guns and adding immensely to the realism of the reproduction of the Hindenburg Line, a portion of which has been reconstructed according to designs by a famous American architect, Mr. Paul Shalfin, assisted by Major Beith and a captain of the Tank Corps.'

The tank despatched across the Atlantic, which had been named *Britannia*, was a British Mark IV Female tank, with at least one researcher stating that it was a Mark IV Tank Tender (unarmed vehicles used to carry supplies) which had been altered by having its supply sponsons replaced by machine-gun sponsons. The fact that *Britannia* was fitted with a cab roof is unusual, this feature only being fitted to a very limited number of Females made by Metropolitan in the serial number range 6001 to 6020.

More than 250,000 people attended Hero Land, generating a net profit of $571,438 (about $10.3 million today) which was distributed amongst the various charities involved.


FOOD CARD. D 3.
A Butter and Margarine.
Shopkeeper's Name:
Address:
B
Shopkeeper's Name:
Address:
C
Shopkeeper's Name:
Address:
D
Shopkeeper's Name:
Address:
INSTRUCTIONS.
1. Fill in your Name and Full Address clearly opposite (E) below, and register this Card at once with your Shopkeeper for Butter and Margarine by giving him that part of the Card. He will fill up the two spaces marked A.
2. Do nothing with the rest of the Card unless public notice is given that the Card is to be used for buying other goods besides Butter and Margarine.
3. This part must be produced every time you want to buy Butter or Margarine.
4. It is only available at the shop where you have registered.
5. It is not transferable.
FOOD CARD. D. 3.
London and Home Counties.
Customer's Name
Address
BUTTER AND MARGARINE.
A.
B.
C.
D.
CUSTOMER'S PART.

RATIONING BEGINS

17 DECEMBER 1917

Top: A Food Card for margarine and butter. These cards were the precursor to ration books which, although introduced late in 1918, are more associated with the Second World War. (HISTORIC MILITARY PRESS)

Above: Women and children wait in a bread line in Britain during the First World War. Though formal rationing was not introduced until the winter of 1917-1918, food shortages had been an ever-present factor of life on the Home Front from the very start of the war. Initially caused by panic buying in the summer of 1914, such shortages continued. In April 1916, for example, Britain only had six weeks of wheat left, a desperate problem when you consider that bread was a staple part of most people's diets. (US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

The actions of the German U-boats, following the reintroduction of unrestricted submarine warfare, and the enormous demands the war imposed upon Britain's merchant fleet, meant that food supplies in the UK came under increasing pressure in 1917. This inevitably led to a number of regulations designed to limit food consumption. Some of these measures, such as a ban on giving bread to horses or chickens, were enshrined in the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) which had been brought into force in 1914.

During April 1917, trading hours were also restricted with a ban on any foodstuffs being sold after 20.00 hours. This regulation drew complaints from theatre-goers who claimed that such an imposition meant that sweets and chocolates could not be sold at any evening performance. A baker who broke the rules was brought before the magistrates at Macclesfield, Cheshire. He was charged with a breach of the DORA regulations, in that he sold three loaves and a quantity of biscuits 'after hours'. He was fined 2s 6d.

It also became illegal to consume more than two courses while lunching in a public eating place or more than three for dinner. Fines were introduced for members of the public found feeding the pigeons or stray animals.

As the food situation worsened, food prices rose rapidly, which led to much discontent amongst the working classes. A scheme of voluntary rationing was promoted on 1 February 1917, with the aim of reducing the consumption of food. This was adopted by some towns, though it was not universally popular in those areas. As the voluntary schemes did not have the desired effect it was eventually decided that state control of food prices and food distribution networks was seen as vital to combat any widespread industrial unrest. The result was that on 18 April 1917, the Cake and Pastry Order was made by Lord Devonport under the Defence of the Realm Regulations. This stated, amongst other restrictions, that after 21 April, no person 'shall make or attempt to make for sale ... Any crumpet, muffin, tea cake, or fancy bread, or any light or fancy pastry, or any other like article.' Tea shops were also not permitted to serve 'any meal whatsoever which begins between the hours of 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. with more than 2 oz. in the whole of bread, cake, bun, scone, and biscuit'.

Further restrictions were imposed on bread and flour, in which bread could not be sold until it was twelve hours old, and no scones were to contain sugar. The quantity of particular foodstuffs served in restaurants, such as meat, was also limited to specific weights.

Eventually, compulsory food rationing was introduced in Britain at the end of 1917, on a district or regional basis. It was Pontypool in Wales that became the first place where this scheme was imposed on 17 December. London's turn came early in 1918 and the scheme had been extended nationwide by the summer. As well as sugar, tea, butter, margarine, cheese and lard were also rationed.

THE END OF THE FOURTH YEAR OF THE WAR

To many, the fourth year of the Great War ended with much the same prospects for victory as had been the case twelve months earlier. To some, 1917 had undoubtedly been a year of attrition.

The reality was, though, that the foundations for victory had well and truly been laid – and the signs of this were there to be seen. As the figures on this page illustrate, though the human cost had been higher in 1917 than in 1916, the true scale of the UK's war effort was producing the means to fight the war in the biggest numbers yet seen. The Central Powers, on the other hand, were no longer capable of matching such an industrial dominance. Add in the effect of America's entry in to the conflict – in terms of both man and machine – then it was becoming clear that the end was, at last, in sight. Indeed, that end would come within twelve months.

There were dangerous moments ahead for the Allies in 1918 – not least the German Spring Offensive, or *Kaiserschlacht*. On 21 March 1918, following a five-hour bombardment by over 6,000 guns, one million German soldiers attacked along a front of nearly fifty miles opposite the British Third and Fifth Armies. The Fifth Army, between the French towns of Amiens and St Quentin, gave way and the Germans were able to make almost unprecedented gains. When their offensive was finally halted, the Germans had penetrated forty miles into the Allied lines, taken over 1,000 guns and inflicted more than 200,000 casualties. The scale of their successes in this day's fighting would not be repeated until the Blitzkrieg of 1940.

The reality was that the Allies had enough resources to not only blunt the enemy offensive but replace the losses. The Germans did not. Throughout the summer and autumn of 1918 the Allies pressed their advantage. So much so that at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918, Germany signed the Armistice with the Allies, bringing a halt to the fighting that had raged around the world during the previous five years.

1917 IN NUMBERS

Number of personnel in the Army by 31 December 1917	3,885,096
BEF Casualties in France and Flanders	
Killed	194,316
Wounded	571,414
Missing and Prisoners of War	52,060
Total	817,790
Royal Navy Casualties (killed, wounded, missing and PoW)	7,899
British Army Expenditure	£725,832,879
Number of enemy troops captured	73,151
Air raid casualties in the UK (according to official statistics)	
Killed	655
Wounded	1,545
Number of horses in the Army	869,931
Number of rifles manufactured in UK	2,123,287
Number of machine-guns manufactured in the UK	79,438
Number of filled shells manufactured	87,668,053

BELOW: One of the most iconic of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's cemeteries or memorials linked to the fighting of 1917 is Tyne Cot Cemetery and Tyne Cot Memorial, which are located a few miles to the north of Ypres. 'Tyne Cot' or 'Tyne Cottage' was the name given by the Northumberland Fusiliers to a barn which stood near the level crossing on the Passchendaele-Broodseinde road. It is now the largest Commonwealth war cemetery in the world in terms of burials. (SHUTTERSTOCK)

GET 3 MONTHS MEMBERSHIP FREE. ACT TODAY TO BENEFIT!

"WFA Conferences are tremendous value with top flight speakers and excellent catering. All in all, really enjoyable."
JP

"Branch events ... a good night out with a top-class speaker and the chance to mix with like-minded people."
MP

"The magazines are great value."
JG

The Somme 1916. An exhausted soldier asleep in a front line trench at Thiepval. Courtesy: Imperial War Museum

"I never realised before I joined the WFA that I would get to be so close to the Cenotaph on 11th November."
RH

The WFA was founded in 1980 to study and commemorate the Great War.

Read all about how you'll benefit as a member below.

Treat yourself to WFA membership today.

*With our special centenary offer, it's tremendous value. Just £29 for 15 months.**

Yes, that's right. Fifteen months' membership for the price of twelve. Here are five good reasons why you should join. As a WFA member,

1. You'll receive three issues a year each of "Stand To!" and "Bulletin", our 60-page printed magazines.

2. You'll be kept informed about events, via our monthly electronic newsletter, "Trenchlines". This also comes with special member offers and invitations to participate in Great War battlefield tours.

3. You'll be welcome at over fifty branches throughout the UK and around the world, and at the WFA remembrance ceremony each year on 11th November at the Cenotaph in London.

4. You'll be welcome at ten specialist conferences a year throughout the UK and be welcome at over 1000 talks annually given by over 200 expert speakers.

5. You'll have access to research grants and/or funding for approved academic studies, and access to research materials for personal projects. Also, access to dissertations, digitised magazine archives, web articles and conference videos.

Now you too can enjoy these benefits and more for less than £2 a month. To take advantage of our special centenary membership offer, please phone Sarah Gunn at the WFA Office on 020 7118 1914, during office hours.

The Western Front Association
BM Box 1914, London WC1N 3XX, United Kingdom. Tel: 020 7118 1914
The WFA is registered as charity number 298365 in the UK.

* Applies to Direct Debit payments only. Renews at £29 per annum.

World War I

History in Miniature since 1893

Static warfare on the Western Front during The Great War required constant repair of trenches, communication lines and barbed wire. British trenches often were water logged and in some sectors it was not unusual to see men in waders if they were available. Our 1916-18 releases reflect these details.

3 Piece Set & Accessories
Limited Edition of 500 Sets

B23109
1916-18 British Vickers Gun and Crew

1 Piece Set

B23110 1916-18 British Infantry in Poncho

1 Piece Set

B23111 1916-18 British Infantry Standing with Souvenir German Helmet

1 Piece Set

B23112 1916-18 British Infantry Standing with Damaged Helmet

2 Piece Set
Limited Edition of 400 Sets

B23113 1916-18 British Infantry Walking with 'Pig Tails' and Walking with Barbed Wire Roll

1:30 Scale

To view the full range of WWI figures or to find your nearest stockist please visit
www.wbritain.net

BACHMANN EUROPE Plc
Model, Collect & Create